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¡Sí Se Come!
Creating a Unique Mexican American Food Identity

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¡Sí Se Come!
Creating a Unique Mexican American Food Identity

by

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my entire family, whose Mexican American heritage has supported and inspired me my entire life, all 9 generations in California, and 13 generations in Texas. You have made me who I am today and allowed me to follow identity issues throughout my educational career.

In particular, the final version published here is dedicated to my Mamá Toni, always my greatest cheerleader and who I know is high fiving me in Heaven. Though she passed away this past April I know she got me through the really, really hard times in being able to finish this project, giving me strength when my self-doubt overwhelmed me. I know she's not resting in peace but is as energetic and busy as she always was, in peace. I love you, Mamá Toni!

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They say it takes a village. To all my countless villagers who are not named here, thank you, too!

¡Sí se pudo!

Abstract

¡Sí Se Come!
Creating a Unique Mexican American Food Identity

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You are what you eat. The essence of being is our identity, so what we choose to eat has a large impact on who we are. By defining identity and applying these definitions in relation to food we can discover how we identify through the foods we eat, creating a food identity. For Mexican Americans, it is la comida que sí se come!

I have classified the following as our most basic forms of identity: mental versus the physical or biological, and individual versus group. Within the group identity stem the facets of race, ethnicity, nationality, language and culture that all make up a Mexican American identity. By thoroughly exploring the four basic classifications of identity we are able to apply the methods of identity creation towards our interactions with food, from our first learned experiences as children, to later cooking for our own children, which all lead to the creation of our food identities.

Once food identity is understood it can be applied specifically to the Mexican American experience, therefore exploring how the food choices that Mexican Americans make contribute towards a unique food identity. Just like the Mexican American self

identity, Mexican American food identity is neither “Mexican” nor “American,” and yet it can be both. Like self identity, this food identity consists of a long historical background, embracing dual nationalities and combining life experiences with culture. It is also heavily influenced by family- familia- more so than a generic food identity.

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PREFACE: MEXICAN BEAN AND CHEESE

Imagine the look of horror I received when I was living in Mexico my junior year of high school and tried to order a bean and cheese[1] taco at a restaurant. As a thirteenth generation Tejana[2] who had grown up in San Antonio, Texas, bean and cheese tacos were among some of the most familiar and common foods one might order. Yet, the simplicity of my order was made immediately unfamiliar for someone who was living in Mexico for the first time. First, I had to think of how to describe the order in Spanish: "Un taco de frijoles refritos con queso (A taco with refried beans and cheese)." Although I am fairly fluent in Spanish, my comfort level of speaking Spanish while in Mexico felt like I was under constant scrutiny. In San Antonio, if one orders a bean and cheese taco "in Spanish," they say: "Quiero un taco de bean and cheese." This bilingual combination of two languages, English and Spanish, also known as Spanglish, is reflective of the two cultures embodied in being Mexican American, the blending of Mexican heritage and culture with American lifestyle and culture.

The distinction between "heritage" and "lifestyle" is important for Mexican Americans, because it signifies a difference between an inheritance from previous generations, as opposed to the present day living situation. Although no two Mexican Americans will be in the same situation, it is often the case that their parents, grandparents or older generations will have grown up living in Mexico, bringing with them Mexican traditions to pass on as an inheritance to their children, who live a very different lifestyle in the United States.

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1 See "Bean and Cheese Taco" in Introduction

2 Tejana*:* A female who identifies as both Texan and Mexican American (not just Mexican, since Texas is now a part of the United States); author's definition. The male version is *Tejano*.

Yet the Spanglish method of ordering in San Antonio is not helpful when ordering in Mexico. Although there is easily a Spanish translation for the individual ingredients of "bean" and "cheese," the name of the food itself has no translation, it is simply "bean and cheese." It is a uniquely Mexican American food, particularly in South Texas, which can only be described in Spanish by using English words.

Being a Mexican American in Mexico takes away the privileges of multiple cultures and languages, especially for Tejanas outside of South Texas. Although I had translated the ingredients of a bean and cheese taco correctly for that Mexican waiter, I had failed to account for the lack of cultural concepts of what a taco is. When I ordered "un taco de frijoles refritos con queso," one would have thought I had asked him for a taco with live bugs in it by the confused and openly disgusted look on his face. He ended up bringing me a small, flat, corn tortilla, typical of the style of taco in Mexico, topped with refried beans and fresh, crumbled queso fresco (literally, fresh cheese), a type of Mexican white cheese. It also came with diced onions, cilantro, and a wedge of lime. This was the Mexican version of a Mexican American food. It wasn't enough to just translate the ingredients; I should have translated the concept. How could I explain to him that bean and cheese tacos only come in flour tortillas? How could I make him understand that just by ordering "de frijoles refritos con queso" I was merely describing the dish without actually naming it?

This is also true for Mexican American food in different parts of the United States. After living eight years in Northern California, which has both a very large Mexican as well as Mexican American population, I learned that ordering a bean and cheese "taco" will elicit a similarly strange look from the waiter and result in a massive burrito that complicates what is supposed to be a very simple recipe by adding a lot of random extra ingredients.

In writing this paper I will be exploring the relationships between Mexican American identity and food, creating a Mexican American food identity. This process will be very similar to the "Mexican bean and cheese," where those unfamiliar with the identity may assume a traditionally Mexican version while forgetting the equally important American half of the identity. Like the concept of a taco, there will be many different versions which are valid, yet may differ from region to region. They are all delicious in their own ways, though!

INTRODUCTION: MEXICAN AMERICANS, FOOD AND IDENTITY

HOW TO DISCOVER THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOOD AND YOUR IDENTITY

I am interested in the food identity of Mexican Americans, not just the traditional recipes that have been passed down from generations before, but also those recipes we have created as a result of living in the United States. These can be Mexican recipes which were changed due to convenience, lack of access to ingredients, access to different kitchen appliances, or for nutritional reasons. They can also include completely American recipes that were influenced or inspired by other Mexican recipes, or even those which have no Mexican relationship but which are a part of the everyday Mexican American experience.

This paper will review various definitions of Mexican American identity, then establish the relationship between food and identity so that we can understand the full definition of a Mexican American food identity. This identity will then be explored through various avenues, from regional to generational differences, in order to represent the varied experiences of Mexican Americans throughout the United States.

Identity Types

One of the most common ways that we identify is through region: "I am a San Antonian. A Texan. Tejana." We can also identify through our occupations, skills, or relationships: "ranchero; student; professor; bilingual; mom." Yet another way to identify is through our ethnic identity. Although the politically correct standard term in the United States is currently "Latino," when I was growing up in South Texas the term was "Hispanic." One can also choose from the more specific "Mexican American," sometimes shortened to and substituted with just "Mexican" or "Mexicano," or, also, Chicano or Chicana[3]. Although there will always be a debate about these many varied terms, the important aspect of each is that which they all have in common, their balance of both Mexican identity and American identity.

In this paper I will be focusing on the Mexican American identity type. I choose to use this particular term because I feel it most clearly states a combination of two identities, one originating in Mexico, the other in the United States, as opposed to a Latino with roots in Cuba, for example, or a Hispanic with roots in Spain. This paper will focus specifically on those who identify as being both "Mexican" and "American" simultaneously, regardless of the different ways those individual terms may be defined differently by different people. This traditionally includes United States citizens, born in the United States, with a Mexican heritage from older generations. It can also include Mexican citizens who have immigrated to the United States and are now living an American lifestyle, a term which is also open to interpretation. The reader should also keep in mind that the United States is a very large country, and that Mexican Americans live in many different American regions, not just along the US-Mexico border.

3 See Chapter 3: Identifying Mexican American Identity for a more in-depth definition.

Food Identity

How is our identity shaped by the foods that we eat day to day? In other words, what is our "food identity?" I have created this term to describe the result of the combination of notions of authenticity and tradition mixed with expressions of convenience, taste exposure, and nutrition. There are the foods that we eat because we grew up with them, our parents grew up with them, and their own parents grew up with them. This is tradition. Yet, overall, the different tastes we have been exposed to might lead us to alter those traditional recipes, or modern kitchen appliances may lead to a change in how those recipes are prepared. As for nutrition, even if we admit that a certain recipe is not truly "authentic[4]" unless it is made precisely the way abuela made it, our day to day cooking habits may lead us to try to use less- or no- lard because of the high prevalence of diabetes in the Mexican American community.

The goal of this paper is to examine the habits and experiences of Mexican Americans in creating, and often recreating, their food identities. The decisions that we make in balancing a desire to express and retain culture through notions of tradition and authenticity with the realities of a fast paced American lifestyle and the realities of a high prevalence of diabetes in the Mexican American community all create the final food identity. These various factors may not necessarily reach equilibrium, but it is that process of balancing which reflects a part of a personal identity. Declaring the dish "enchiladas" to be a "Mexican" food identifies the food as having a Mexican origin, but does not explain the origin of the person eating those enchiladas, their culture or their experiences. For this, we need their food identity. By getting to know the foods we eat, why we eat them and how we eat them, we have a better understanding of that person's identity through food; their food identity.

4 See Introduction, section on Cultural Tradition and Authenticity; Familiarity

Cultural Tradition and Authenticity

Do changes to a "traditional" recipe make that recipe less authentic? Let us define traditional as that which is accepted by all members of a group, be it a family or a larger community, and as being reflective of that group over time. For the purpose of this paper it is a reflection of culture. What if changes to cultural tradition are for health reasons? For instance, does the decision to not use lard when making homemade flour tortillas make those tortillas less authentic? They will certainly be less delicious, but, if, over a few generations, the "tradition" becomes to not use lard, then their authenticity has been recreated. If tradition creates authenticity, then it is possible that the "new authentic" flour tortillas could become, and some may argue that they already are, lardless flour tortillas.

Familiarity

The other part of determining authenticity is familiarity. How is one able to say "this is the real thing, this is authentic, and that is not?" It is the experience of having seen a thing before, smelled it and tasted it, which creates such a close familiarity with that object, in this case a food, that a person feels comfortable enough to claim authority over it, creating authenticity.

Familiarity is a concept that Lisa Heldke discusses in Counihan and Van Esterik's text *Food and Culture* (Counihan, C. and Van Esterik, P. 2008: 331). For Heldke, it is the idea that ethnic food, like "Mexican[5]" food, is often considered exotic because of its novelty. Rather than creating authenticity through familiarity, she assumes authenticity

5 The term "Mexican food" in the United States often refers to foods which have been changed from the original Mexican, being from Mexico, recipe, but which many people, who are ignorant, still assume count as being authentically Mexican. This includes many Mexican American foods, the most common of which are probably "Tex Mex" and "Cali Mex." See Introduction, Mexican American Food; Chapter 5, Mexican American Food Identity.

through unfamiliarity: “Because it is unfamiliar to me, I assume it must be a genuine or essential part of that other culture; it becomes the marker of what distinguishes my culture from another.” She in fact simultaneously creates authenticity through familiarity by claiming the authenticity of her own culture as a way to compare and create authenticity through unfamiliarity of another culture, in this case Mexican.

Region

Another way to look at familiarity is through region or location. This is most easily viewed through local restaurants. For someone visiting a new city, who has never experienced a local food and who is completely unfamiliar with the local concept of authenticity, an easy way to find that authenticity is to trust the locals, those who are already familiar, to guide them. If they do not know any locals then they may rely on the local chefs of a restaurant who may post signs claiming the authenticity of their food.

For instance, if one is not from Texas and is unfamiliar with Texas barbeque, then a visit to Texas assumes trust in the regional identity of a Texas restaurant to provide what is required to make that barbeque “authentically Texan.” Region is particularly important to consider for those restaurants who claim a regional authenticity outside of that particular region. Try going to an “authentic Texas barbeque restaurant” outside of Texas, perhaps in California. There is no longer the trust of local chefs with local knowledge of authenticity. Although anyone can follow a recipe, suggesting that non-locals also have the ability to create regionally authentic food, there are other aspects of regional authenticity, such as access to local ingredients, or secret cooking methods, which may make it more difficult for non-locals to accurately recreate the same food.

Mexican American Food

This is also true of Mexican American food. How is it different from Mexican food- that is, food from Mexico? By taking a traditionally Mexican dish and adding some sort of American influence. One of the most common foods thought of as "authentically Mexican" are enchiladas. Yet, in the United States, particularly in South Texas, we eat our enchiladas with yellow cheese, whereas Mexicans use white cheese; we eat the enchiladas with refried beans instead of borrachos[6]. Although this is not always the case, these differences are what make them uniquely Mexican American, specifically "Tex-Mex," a combination of Texan and Mexican, and not Mexican.

For this paper I aim to give a clear understanding of the difference between what is understood to be "Mexican" food in the United States, Mexican food from Mexico, and what I am calling Mexican American food. Like Mexican American identity, Mexican American food is that which embraces a Mexican origin, or heritage, while simultaneously evoking American tastes and lifestyle. Part of creating these definitions will be to understand why Mexican Americans make the various choices they do in creating Mexican American foods.

For example, another Mexican American food is the Frito pie: a bowl full of Frito's corn chips, covered in nacho or melted yellow cheese, and chili beans. There is almost no Mexican origin to this Texas specialty. Even though it includes "nacho" cheese, nachos are yet another Mexican American food, not Mexican. Despite this, most Mexican Americans in South Texas grew up eating and enjoying Frito pie regularly, a part of their American lifestyle. This regularity and exposure leads to familiarity with the food, making it an equally legitimate part of a Mexican American food identity.

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6 Literally translated: "drunken;" A style of cooking pinto beans so that they are soupy with broth, often served in a cup or bowl. Some recipes call for beer or other alcohol, thus "intoxicating" the beans.

Expectations versus reality

When Mexican Americans eat "Mexican" food, there is a certain expectation of what it should look like and what it will taste like. Along with this expectation is the idea that the food should be prepared in a very specific way, with specific ingredients, and should take a specific amount of time to make. If any of these expectations are not met, then it is not considered "real" Mexican food.

Yet many Mexican Americans live an American lifestyle which does not allow sufficient time to devote to their kitchens. American culture is one of convenience, and this is reflected in Mexican American food. Mexican food requires not only the time to cook it but also the time to find the correct ingredients, and, often, time to figure out the recipe. There are two places one usually gets a recipe from: either directly, from our family, or indirectly, from a cookbook, or the Internet, or Food Network, etc. If the recipe is from mom or abuela, there is often the problem of figuring out the meaning of their instructions: "Add a 'pinch' of salt; a 'handful' of flour; make sure you put 'enough' water." How much is enough?

Language/Translation

Or there might be a language problem. Maybe mom only knows the name of an ingredient in Spanish, and, even if one speaks Spanish, which not all Mexican Americans do, this difference can make it difficult to find the item at the local grocery store. In South Texas, HEB, the local grocery chain, carries many Mexican products and ingredients, but if the recipe is not something that is made regularly, then one may not know what aisle it is on, and it can be difficult to ask a store associate to help find what you yourself are unsure you are looking for. Going to a Mexican market, or mercado, can be equally frustrating, since the brands are different and the store is arranged differently.

As Heldke points out, “availability does not automatically spell familiarity...[L]anguage is of little help to the cook...[if] things are unlabeled, or labeled in a 'foreign language,' and the people in the stores speak another language, too” (Counihan, C. and Van Esterik, P. 2008: 332).

Of course, mom may be able to help by explaining where in the store to go and what to look for when shopping. If the recipe comes from a cookbook then Google can be instrumental in helping to translate anything unfamiliar. However, it is this very unfamiliarity, the process of translation, the process of figuring out where to go and what to get, that makes Mexican food just as exotic for many Mexican Americans as it is for many other Americans.

Mexican American food- The Bean and Cheese Taco

Mexican American food, on the other hand, is fast and easy. Take, for instance, the bean and cheese taco. The flour tortilla is easy to find almost everywhere in the United States. In South Texas they are also available to go, freshly made, from many restaurants. It is rare to find a Mexican American who still makes their own tortillas, from scratch, by hand, regularly. My own Mexican American grandmother only makes them sporadically, as a special treat. Similarly, refried beans can easily be “doctored” out of a can by adding spices to improve the taste. Even if they are made from scratch, the hardest part of making beans is just waiting for them to finish cooking. Place the beans into the tortilla, melt in some shredded yellow cheese and you are done almost as quickly as you read this paragraph.

Chapter 2: How We Identify: From Human Identity to Mexican American Identity

"Minimally, the term human nature refers to those permanent and universal capacities, desires and dispositions- in short, properties- that all human beings share by virtue of belonging to a common species" (Song, M. 2003: 115).

To understand how we as human beings identify, we must first define identity. As mentioned in the preface, there are many different types of identities that human beings use, but there are a few basic ways of identifying which all other identity types stem from. I have classified these four as our most basic forms of identity: mental versus the physical or biological, and individual versus group. As *Identity in Modern Society: A Social Psychological Perspective* puts it: "Self aspects can refer…to generalized psychological characteristics or traits…physical features…roles…abilities…tastes (e.g. preference for French red wines), attitudes…behaviours…and explicit group or category membership" (Simon, B. 2004: 45). When we express membership in a Mexican American identity it falls under the group classification. Although this identity type is usually understood as a racial identity, another type of the basic group classification, it is important to note that it is the "Mexican" aspect of Mexican American that is stereotypically understood to be racial, whereas the "American" aspect refers to a national identity, yet another sub-classification of group.

By looking more closely at these sub-classifications it becomes easy to see that all "[i]dentity results from interaction in the social world and in turn guides interaction in the social world" (Simon, B. 2004: 2). Children are not born with an innate understanding of race or nationality, for these are concepts that must be learned and which are taught by society: "At best, the search for the essence of identity as a 'thing,' say, in the form of a physiological or hard-wired mental structure, would then be a futile effort…such a search

would be a misleading endeavour that diverts our efforts from a more promising process-oriented course" (Simon, B. 2004: 3). I believe this more promising process is the sum of our experiences, those events and interactions which truly make us who we are, on all four levels of classification, from mental to physical, individual to group. Given these four classifications, combined with our life experiences, I define identity as: the sum of experiences based on at least one of the four basic identity forms. Therefore, in order to understand Mexican American identity we must first better understand these basic forms of identity.

CLASSIFICATION 1: MENTAL IDENTITY

"[E]ven if identity turns out to be an analytic fiction, it will prove to be a highly useful analytic fiction in the search for a better understanding of human experiences and behaviours" (Simon, B. 2004: 3).

As children we learn to identify our sense of self at the same time that we identify the world around us. Before we are able to articulate our thoughts with language, before we can walk, we quickly learn to recognize our own names, to recognize that this sound of syllables is related to our self, our identity: "[O]ne's name…may be the 'most important anchorage of our self identity'" (Snyder, C. R. and Fromkin, H. L. 1980: 129). It is important because as infants we cannot recognize alphabets or understand how language works, but we can understand the difference between "you" and "me." Of course, in order to have an understanding of "you" there must be another human being present. An isolated infant raised by robots will still have a sense of self as compared to the other object being interacted with, which shows how, even at this most infantile level, our first, basic understanding of identity is based on social interaction: "The mind emerges as symbolic representations are practised and communicated during social

interaction. The mind is thus a product of symbolic social actions mediated by language and so is the self" (Simon, B. 2004: 21).

In social psychology there is a model, known as SAMI, used to describe human beings' process of self identification. As we interact with the world and add new experiences to our lives, we make sense of these interactions by deciding what they mean to us, which in turn gives meaning to our own self-identity:

> [The self-aspect model of identity (SAMI)]…refers to the social-cognitive process whereby people give coherence and meaning to their own experiences, including their relations with the physical and social environment. Through self-interpretation, people achieve an understanding of themselves or, in other words, an identity, which in turn influences their subsequent perception and behaviour (Simon, B. 2004: 45).

Even when a person becomes afflicted with amnesia, despite the loss of memory of their past experiences, and the meanings of those experiences, a person does not lose their self identity (Amnesia 2011). This suggests that the particular meaning given to the experience is not as important as going through the experience itself. Even for amnesiacs, it is the ability to understand a sense of self that leads to identity, even if their place within the world is in question: "A person is someone who has the self-conscious thoughts expressed by using 'I'" (Glover, J. 1988: 88).

As a person, however, "I" can have multiple meanings based on a multitude of experiences. This explains not only how the amnesiac is able to continue to grow their sense of self as they encounter new experiences after gaining their affliction, but also why that sense of self, post affliction, might be completely different from the sense of self that existed pre-affliction:

> …it should be noted that in new situations new self-aspects can be construed, and that in different situations different sub-sets or combinations of self-aspects may be processed and used for self-interpretation. Consequently, a person can also have different individual identities (Glover, J. 1988: 52).

This is also relevant for Mexican American identities, as they must balance the situations and experiences of two different cultures. This will be further reviewed in the coming pages.

CLASSIFICATION 2: PHYSICAL/BIOLOGICAL IDENTITY

"And our bodies themselves, are they simply ours, or are they us? –William James: The Principles of Psychology" (Glover, J. 1988: 83)

The next process of development our identity goes through as human beings is physical interaction, usually through our bodies. There is a transition that occurs when conceiving of the self in the mind, understanding the difference between "you" and "me," and then linking that concept to one's own physical body as opposed to other bodies. As infants continue to grow new parents are told that touch, skin to skin contact, is one of the most important things they can do for their new child, as it contributes to much of their development, from hormones to growth in the brain, including their recognition of themselves (Harmon, K. 2010). The simple act of touching one's own body to another reinforces the idea that our body is our own and is a part of who we are. Without touch, our bodies are still constantly visible. Even with our eyes closed there is always a sense of the body as existing, and it exists as our self. "Even when no mirror is around, part of the body is often visible…Some psychologists have argued that seeing our own bodies plays a part in visual perception of the rest of the world" (Glover, J. 1988: 78). It is this connection with the physical body that makes a mental concept of self strongest. It is difficult to understand the most basic idea of self identity without including both the mental and the physical together: "[Descartes] thought that 'I' refers to a thinking mind, inseparable from a particular body but not reducible to it, and which has experiences and thoughts without being reducible to them" (Glover, J. 1988: 89). Yet again we see how

important one's experiences are in contributing towards a sense of self, even when only considering the "thinking mind" in relation to the body.

This relationship is not without complications. On the one hand, times of sleep or being in surgery, for instance, negate the thinking mind and leave only the body. Although the mental is unable to perceive the physical, the self continues to exist. On the other hand, we have already established that it is impossible for the body to be the sole source of our identity without the mental:

> …my body is what is perceived by others when they perceive me. And the special ways in which I am aware of my body are at least a large part of my own self-consciousness. Should I then stop thinking of my body as mine and think of it as me? [Yet] [m]y corpse is not me…The first [issue] is whether all parts of my body are essential to my existence. The second is whether saying that I am my body allows an adequate role for my mental life (Glover, J. 1988: 83).

One way to consider the role of the body separate from the mind is to consider those who become ill, injured or handicapped: "it is natural for people to feel that they are not cramped or limited as their bodies are" (Glover, J. 1988: 93). Or, one can look at the intersection between the physical and the mental by considering concepts of an afterlife. In some religions, the soul, which can be thought of as mental, is the true form of identity, which continues after the death of the physical body. Secular belief leads to an understanding of nothingness, belief that both the mind and the body no longer exist:

> The belief in death and birth as sharp boundaries does not go well with the thought that I am identical with any particular set of my physical or mental characteristics. For they may emerge or fade away gradually. So this line of thought makes it again natural to think that I am not reducible to such features, but am an ego that owns them (Glover, J. 1988: 92).

This reminder from Glover of the reality that our bodies are temporary, that they will gradually fade away, reminds us of what he identifies as three concepts of body

image (Glover, J. 1988: 81), different from the common understanding of the body in relation to vanity. As discussed earlier, there is the literal visual image of our body that is ever present through sight. There is also the tactile image of the body, how it feels when sight is taken away. Lastly, there is the awareness of personal size, shape and posture, which is "not just a matter of sensations, although they may contribute to it" (Glover, J. 1988: 81). These body images all focus on the key relationship between the body and the self. Our bodies give us a very specific physical identity separate from the mental, even though the two are so closely bound together. Glover's concept of a bodily "frontier" illustrates where the line is between our own bodies and the rest of the world: "When others see or touch me, what they perceive is my body…I do not perceive it in the same way others do, and this contributes to my sense that its frontiers are mine" (Glover, J. 1988: 69).

One of the most important parts of our bodies are our faces. They are important because they are one of the most recognizable parts, which is a quick reminder for others viewing our bodies to know who we are. This link between the face and recognition is a strong connection to our body and our identity. Yet, "[f]aces are not just recognized. We also interpret them. We can often tell what people are looking at, or even thinking about, and what their reaction or emotional state is" just by looking at their faces (Glover, J. 1988: 70). This interpretation by others onto our identity reinforces the importance of experiences, since it is our experiences in giving meaning to the various facial expressions that is the process of interpretation.

However, Glover points out that one set of experiences is not necessarily the only set we will ever have, nor are they necessarily unchanging, as is evidenced when misinterpretations occur in reading facial expressions:

> Reductionism denies that "I" refers to a separate owner of my experiences. One version says I am reducible to my physical characteristics…Another [says] [t]he "owner" is reduced to the stream of experiences. This clashes with some deep intuitive convictions…that, although I have had one set of experiences, I could have had a quite different set (Glover, J. 1988: 88-89).

This is particularly relevant for Mexican Americans who encounter cultural clashes within their own culture(s). Often, it is the possibility of having had more or less Mexican cultural influence in their lives that becomes a struggle in creating their self identity. This will be discussed further in this paper in the section on culture.

CLASSIFICATION 3: INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

"[P]eople have a 'need for separate identity' or a 'need for uniqueness…'" (Snyder, C. R. and Fromkin, H. L. 1980: 24)

In discussing both mental and physical identity we have been referring to the individual person, identity based on one self alone, sometimes in relation to others, but not in conjunction with others. In considering the self aspects of SAMI, individual identity can be defined as the distinct self aspects which differentiate one person from other individuals, as well as other groups of people:

> …an individual identity is constructed whenever self-interpretation is based on a more comprehensive set or configuration of different, non-redundant self-aspects…The more comprehensive and complex this set or configuration, the more pronounced one's individual identity, and the less likely it is that another person possesses an identical set of self-aspects (Simon, B. 2004: 50).

As Simon points out, complexity of self aspects make it less likely that another person will be the same as that set, yet it is not impossible. It is this uncertain likelihood that leads individuals to desire uniqueness as a trait of their individual identity: "…individuals want to perceive themselves as having some differences and are constantly struggling with cultural and social forces that inhibit the expression and self-

perception of uniqueness" (Snyder, C. R. and Fromkin, H. L. 1980: 198). I will discuss cultural identity in the next section, in relation to group identity. However, it is here that we first begin to build a Mexican American identity, now that we have established the first three basic classifications of identity. As individuals, Mexican Americans have the same desire to be unique from others, yet, as we will see in the discussion of group identity, the desire to conform to cultural norms, whether they be of Mexican culture, American culture, or the distinct Mexican American culture, can, at times, conflict with the individual desire to be unique from a group of people.

We began this chapter by defining identity as the sum of experiences based on at least one of the four basic identity forms. Having explored the various aspects of this definition, it is now necessary to discuss the creation of identity, the process by which both individuals and groups arrive at this definition; at identity itself. Although we have yet to explore group identity fully, I feel it is important to first have an understanding of the difference between defining identity and creating identity. We have established that experiences are key to the definition of identity, but it is the choices we make in deciding which experiences to have that set apart identity creation from definition. Of course, there are times when we do not have a choice in the experiences we gain, such as which family to be born into. Both kinds of experiences, those we choose and those which simply happen to us, are equally valid in defining our identities. However, it is those experiences we choose which allow us to have creative access in shaping our identities. It is "the ways people think of themselves, and how they use these ideas in shaping their own distinctive characteristics. It is about how far we create ourselves" (Glover, J. 1988: 13). As we continue into the next section on group identity, let us remind ourselves that "[a]ll individuals develop a set of attitudes and beliefs about their world and about themselves. These beliefs are a result of the prior and current

experiences of each person. Our beliefs can serve…[to] derive a sense of difference relative to other people" (Snyder, C. R. and Fromkin, H. L. 1980: 145).

CLASSIFICATION 4: GROUP IDENTITY

"Today, most scholars in the field of social psychology acknowledge what appears to be a 'discontinuity' between the perception and behaviour of people acting as individuals…and the perception and behaviour of people acting as group members" (Simon, B. 2004: 48). It may seem obvious in our day to day lives, but there is a distinct difference in the way we may behave in some groups or situations and the way we may behave when we are alone. Yet, they are all a part of our "self concept," which include these four aspects: Personal Identity, Collective Identity, Personal (Self) Esteem, and Collective Esteem (Taylor, D. 2002: 36).

This may be partly due to the question of how we identify with various groups. Group identity refers to both of two definitions: how a group of people decide to similarly identify themselves together; how a person identifies in relation to a group of people as opposed to alone. On the one hand, SAMI allows that individuals may feel comfortable being a part of a specific group identity because their own individual identity is already very strong: "…some sense of individuality…may itself be an antecedent or precondition of collective identity, especially in modern society where individuality and individual identity seem to have acquired the status of an ideological or cultural ideal" (Taylor, D. 2002: 90). On the other hand, there is room for individuals to desire a group identity to supplement a weak individual identity: "...a high number of self-aspects, or high self-complexity, is particularly conducive to individual identity, whereas collective

identity seems to require a narrower focus on a single or only a few self-aspects" (Taylor, D. 2002: 90).

Whichever the reason, once an individual has established their role within the group through some sort of connection, it is the relationship that individual has with their own group membership that can distinguish them in terms of their individuality, returning to a focus on individual identity within their group identity (Taylor, G. and Spencer, S. 2004: 98).

> The multiplicity and diversity of one's collective identities reflect and endorse the complex system of social coordinates or self-aspects within which oneself is located and which in turn facilitates and necessitates self-interpretation as a distinct and independent individual (Simon, B. 2004: 55).

The other side of group membership is the risk of losing individual identity in order to uphold the group's identity: "[W]e can go the other way and relate [the individual] only to the restrictive traits associated with a general label [of group identity] in such a way that they are seen in no other terms" (Taylor, G. and Spencer, S. 2004: 98).

If group identity can so easily either return to individual identity, or else practically erase individual identity, why would an individual choose to associate with a group identity in the first place? Group identity creates "group loyalties [which] are bound up with individuals' sense of their own identity. The connections can be simply stated. Concern with identity creates a need for recognition. And we want that recognition to be validated: the group that gives it must in turn be given similar recognition and respect" (Glover, J. 1988: 200). Key to this recognition are three components (Glover, J. 1988: 164): "We want people to see us at least roughly as we think we are." This involves not only our own defined identity, but also the identity that the group places upon us through their perceptions; "We want to be respected." By associating with the group and maintaining the established group identity we easily gain

respect from the other group members; "And we want to be liked." Since self identity is based on the self aspects we choose to use through our experiences, when the group identity has similar self aspects this can lead to members of the group liking each other: "[C]ollective identity results from self-interpretation that centres on a socially shared (collective or social categorical) self-aspect" (Simon, B. 2004: 49).

Race and Biology

"…race, in addition to sex and age, is one of the first things that is noticed about someone" (Song, M., 2003: 12).

Of course, there are those groups whose identity was created for them in a negative connotation, as a way to make other groups feel superior. In particular, we can look at the origins of the Mexican American group identity, as decided by the Anglo group, since it was the Anglo Spaniards and the Anglo early Americans who had the most influence on defining "Mexican" identity:

> The unique features of the Latina/o population's [including Mexican Americans] multiracial composition have their roots in Spanish colonialism, in which colonial states imposed racial hierarchies that were more gradational and fluid than their northern Anglo counterparts…This pattern, in addition to the subsequent colonization by the United States in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, factored centrally in the complex re-racialization of the Latina/o population (Song, M. 2003: 65).

I will discuss this history in further detail in the section on Mexican American identity. What is important to understand from this early colonization is that the "Mexican" part of a Mexican American identity was, and to a large extent still is, based on race, the race of the Mexican people, a creation of the native Indians mixed with the colonizing Spaniards. The skin of the native Indians was a darker brown in comparison to the fairer skinned Spaniards, so race, at first, was most easily defined as a difference in skin color. This

returns us to classification 2, physical identity, or what can also be considered a biological identity: "[R]ace is the key term historically associated with a classificatory system for distinguishing between human beings on the basis of biological features and genetic inheritance" (Song, M. 2003: 93). These biological features referred to phenotypical aspects, those physical features on a human body which were visibly different, such as skin color, hair color, hair type, or shapes of lips, noses, and eyes. Although most social scientists today now accept as common knowledge that biology and genetics are not a valid measure of race, "this near consensus has not had a uniformly sweeping impact on how they carry out social-scientific research, most of whom still employ racial categories as if they were biologically given and fixed" (Coates, R. D. 2004: 55). It seems that it is very difficult to get away from the biological association with race when it was understood as such for so long. This is a problem when "[t]he concept of race has tended to refer to a biologically (and genetically) distinct subpopulation of a species" (Song, M. 2003: 9), and "race" refers to those who are not "white:"

> "[R]ace" refers to people who are non-white, and denotes cultural "difference." "Race" is used as a way of designating certain categories within our culture, and it does this from an invisible, undesignated position. This is the position of whiteness…The adjective ["black" or "brown"] marks an aberration from the white norm, drawing attention to their skin colour in a way which doesn't generally happen for people who are white. Whiteness is what is standard, regular and tacitly expected as such (Taylor, G. and Spencer, S. 2004: 91).

This means anyone who is not "white," who has race, is part of a subpopulation of white human beings, as opposed to being their equals. Luckily we can continue to fight this notion of race by reiterating its basis in social interactions, as we have already established that all identity is based on these: "Because race is a social construct without biological validity, how and where racial boundaries are constructed are intrinsically open to

question, and the possibility of reconstruction always exists" (Coates, R. D. 2004: 55).

This reconstruction of race is not a new concept. "[I]n 1849, a prominent Mexican ranchero…argued impassionately that the term 'white' referred to European ancestry and social standing- as it was understood under Spanish and Mexican rule- not merely to skin color" (Coates, R. D. 2004: 67). This argument shows how social interactions such as social standing, either through wealth or through the socially valued existence of a European heritage, can easily change the race of a person within that same person's lifetime. Even though heritage has a biological basis, the interesting part of this argument is that heritage is said to be more highly valued than white skin color. This is particularly relevant to the many Mexicans who may be dark skinned from their Indian ancestry and yet have European heritage from their Spanish ancestry. Unfortunately, this did not mean that skin color was completely removed from the racial equation: "…The synthesis resulting from the confrontation of the two cultures of race in the Southwest was a racial order that recognized the 'whiteness' and hence citizenship rights of some Mexicans but denied them of many others" (Coates, R. D. 2004: 67). Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo defined all Mexicans living in the newly Americanized territories (thus creating the very first Mexican Americans overnight) as "honorary whites," formally granting them "access to U.S. citizenship, a privileged status that…was reserved only for 'free white persons' at the time…[T]he fact that [Mexicans] were not of African ancestry factored centrally in their attaining an 'honorary' white status at this time." The distinction between this honorary status and an actual belief would allow for decades of discrimination against Mexican Americans in the United States, discrimination which continues today. Race in the United States is most commonly understood through the "one drop rule," the idea that a single drop of blood of a particular race gives that person a full claim to that race, whether it be to their benefit, as might be the case of affirmative

action, or to their detriment, as is the case of any form of discrimination. Unlike the Mexican ranchero of earlier, who could have used the one drop rule to claim his drop of European, and therefore "white racial heritage," race in the United States today uses the one drop rule to point to the nonwhite part of a person's racial identity, as is the case of our "first Black president," President Obama, who is half white and half Black.

> [In Latin America] one can be racially reclassified through class mobility and other mitigating factors and that even persons within the same family may identify and be identified as belonging to different racial categories based on somatic features, color, hair texture, etc. Unlike racial classification in the United States, which depends, above all, on descent and hence is perceived as immutable, racial classification in Latin America is less rigid (Coates, R. D. 2004: 69).

Ironically, few racists today would admit to believing in racial genetic inheritance; "They would point to cultural or national differences instead" (Taylor, G. and Spencer, S. 2004: 93). Before we can discuss cultural and national identity, and their roles under racial identity, it is important to note the existence of the term "ethnicity." Although "race" and "ethnicity" are often used interchangeably in everyday language,

> "Race" is said to be "socially defined but on the basis of physical criteria," whereas an ethnic group is socially defined on the basis of cultural criteria…"ethnicity" is a more "inclusive" term than "race," because while "race" is predicated…on biological membership of a particular group, ethnic groups are generally seen as having more fluid and blurred boundaries (Song, M. 2003: 10).

Ethnicity is what we usually mean when discussing race in the United States, that membership in a group based on cultural criteria. Part of these criteria is the fact that members within the group are conscious of belonging to that group. This conscious decision in creating identity acknowledges that the group is "within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, [they have] memories of a shared past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements which define the group's identity, such

as kinship, religion, language, shared territory, nationality or physical appearance" (Song, M. 2003: 6-7).

In the case of the Mexican American ethnic group, their common Mexican ancestry lives within the larger American society. The symbolic elements exist, with kinship being often present with large families living nearby or remaining closely in contact; language in both English and Spanish; shared territory in the American Southwest (although our numbers continue to grow throughout the country). Although we have already discussed the problems with assigning group membership based on physical appearance, it is a natural human reaction to look for visible similarities between group members, so this element continues to be present.

Nationality

"[H]istoric minorities, which found themselves surrounded by larger nations…and minorities which left their mother countries for political, economic or religious reasons" (Taylor, G. and Spencer, S., 2004: 201).

It should be noted that another important aspect of being an active member of an ethnic group means that one will "participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients" (Taylor, G. and Spencer, S., 2004: 44). The common origin for Mexican Americans is the country of Mexico. Whether they be part of a long lineage of families who were in the American Southwest when it was still a part of Mexico, recent immigrants who were born in Mexico but have lived many years in the US, or anything in between, there are various types of people who can claim a Mexican American identity. However, all Mexican Americans share an eventual origin in the country of Mexico. It is often confusing for many outside of the Mexican American identity, including many Mexican nationals, why Mexican Americans may express such a strong tie to a country they may not have been born in, may not have any family in, and may never have even visited. "Why is the shared identity of a group so often expressed as

nationalism? Defense of a shared language and culture is only part of an explanation" (Glover, J. 1988: 199). Many Mexican Americans may have no ties at all to the country of Mexico, yet will still express a pride in celebrating Mexican holidays and cultural traditions. These expressions are not a confusion of national identity, nor do they show preference for one nationality over another. Instead, they serve as a way of sharing in a common history and heritage of the group's identity: "If nationality and ethnic group coincide, then the two identities may be interchangeable. But most nations are multicultural, and while national identity may touch many aspects of a person's life, it is cultural identity that is the more pervasive" (Taylor, D. 2002: 45).

Language

"At the most basic level [culture] is reflected in the language, including the ways in which its syntax, grammar and vocabulary divide up and describe the world. Societies sharing a common language share at least some cultural features in common" (Song, M., 2003: 143).

Since culture is the key to national identity as a part of an ethnic identity, it makes sense that language would be a key aspect of cultural identity. Although the Spanish language is spoken in many countries, including Mexico and the United States, it is the fact that it can be used as an easy connection between two different individuals in order to have something in common that makes language so important. The fact that it can be used in both Mexico and the United States, or wherever an individual may be for that matter, makes Spanish a large part of allowing Mexican Americans to connect with each other.

> Language is one of the few tangible manifestations of collective identity…language is socialized from birth and, unlike other visible signs of culture, language requires a great deal of effort to master. Moreover, it is extremely difficult to attain nativelike fluency without any trace of accent…As the mechanism for communication, it is an aspect of culture that is exclusive to

> members of the culture and one that permits private communication among members of a cultural group. For these reasons, language, while not absolutely essential to culture, is nevertheless extremely important (Taylor, D. 2002: 46)

Certainly, language is not essential to culture, for there are many Mexican Americans who speak no Spanish at all. Although inner cultural circles have debated whether or not lack of a knowledge of Spanish lessens a person's claim to their ethnic identity, whether it makes them "less Mexican American," I argue that these individuals have equal claim to their ethnic identity. While Spanish is

> extremely important…there is no single element that is required for culture. A group's collective identity or culture is socially defined by the group, and, thus, it is for the group to decide which elements are essential, which are optional, and which are irrelevant.

Since language is something that can be learned at any point in a person's life, it is an aspect of identity which can always be added and is not exclusive to only certain people. Moreover, the social nature of identity formation allows for language to be essential in certain inner circles and optional or irrelevant in others.

For those Mexican American circles who do consider Spanish to be essential, "language determines the cultural setting and the whole way of life of a community, since the objective reality is perceived and encoded according to the structure of the language used by this community" (Taylor, G. and Spencer, S. 2004: 206). This is particularly true for many Mexican Americans who may be recent immigrants to the United States or who have particularly close ties to Mexico, since Spanish creates a familiar setting for those who may feel unfamiliar with everything else around them. Even those immigrants who identify as Mexican American due to many years of living in the United States and thus identify with various American ways of life may still feel uncomfortable with certain American experiences:

> …For trans-national, diasporic communities [such as Mexican Americans], the authentic language of their forsaken home is important both as a creator of a specific cultural environment and, simply, as a means of communication which makes possible the very existence of non-territorial, not geographically bound, ethnic groups. It is the language that sustains culture and creates experience. It is the language that gives the feeling of sameness and belonging.

Culture

"'Our culture is one we live, which has shaped us, and with which we identify" (Song, M. 2003: 155).

Now that we have an understanding of how race, nationality, and language all play a role in creating culture it is clear the way that our experiences, where we live and the language(s) we speak, although related, may be very different from the race we are born into. Our experiences, to a certain extent, are by choice. Our biology is not: "Heritage is then a camouflage for heredity" (Taylor, G. and Spencer, S. 2004: 93). Of course, the heritage of our culture is often inherited from our heredity, from the situational experiences of being born into a certain race. Yet our heredity does not define our culture. For example, those who identify as multiracial may participate in multiple cultural practices associated with various races, or choose to practice one particular culture over another. Or, an individual adopted by parents of a different race may practice the cultural traditions of their parents. There are many examples which allow that culture is defined by society, and is a personal choice that is shaped by our experiences:

> "Although definitions of culture vary widely, there is agreement about two features. First, culture is socially defined. That is, culture arises when members of a group come to share the same values, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral patterns. Second, there is agreement that culture is not tangible and so is extremely difficult to define concretely" (Taylor, D. 2002: 44).

These varied definitions of culture can also include language and the extent to which it may shape thought, shared personality characteristics, cognitive styles, or a shared history" (Taylor, D. 2002: 67).

Even though culture overall is defined by society, it is also important to note the differences between culture and society. "Broadly speaking, society refers to a group of human beings and the structure of their relations, culture to the content and the organizing and legitimizing principles of these relations" (Song, M. 2003: 146). For Mexican Americans the group of human beings that are the culturally defining society may vary by region. For example, Mexican Americans in Texas may have different cultural practices than Mexican Americans in California. The nature of the larger group identity, "Mexican American," allows these two example groups to have many cultural practices in common, such as speaking Spanish or enjoying frijoles (beans) with their meals. However, within the two distinct groups, Texas and California, there may be different Spanish words that are used, different phrases or slang; the beans will probably be in a burrito in California, and in a taco in Texas. Both communities exhibit equally valid forms of cultural expression, they just do it differently. Both communities are equally Mexican American: "The bonds [of a cultural community] grow out of shared beliefs, common objects of love, shared historical memories…One acquires a network of close relations and a system of support, and becomes bound by the ties of mutual expectations and common interests" (Song, M. 2003: 156). It is this closely knit network that attracts many individuals to claim a group identity for themselves. It "entitles one to participate in the group's culture and politics; it gives one a claim to distinctive ways of talking, dressing, interacting, eating, and so on" (Song, M. 2003: 41). At the same time, group membership involves a certain level of obligation to the group identity. For Mexican Americans this often results in a state of anxiety since the definitions group

identity are so flexible and uncertain. Usually, the question is whether or not one can be "Mexican enough" to qualify as Mexican American, yet there is no exact definition of how much "Mexican" is "enough," nor is there an exact definition of "Mexican," yet another flexible and uncertainly defined group identity. This uncertainty is human nature and extends to all human beings:

> Much of human nature is thus not a product of nature but of human struggle. It is natural in the sense that it is acquired by virtue of belonging to the human species, but it is not natural in the sense that it is a result of the efforts of the species itself and forms part of its process of self-creation (Song, M. 2003: 119).

This reiterates the process of identity creation. Since culture is defined by society, society creates cultural identity every time it decides "the rules and norms that govern such basic activities and social relations as how, where, when and with whom one eats, associates and makes love, how one mourns and disposes of the dead, and treats one's parents, children, wife, neighbours [sic] and strangers" (Song, M. 2003: 144).

Identity in the US: A note on stereotyping

As we close our discussion of culture I would like to take all the classifications of identity we have recognized to take a look at the idea of stereotyping. There is a classic saying that "there is some truth to all stereotypes," meaning that the generalized ideas encompassed in a stereotype are usually based on an originating fact. For instance, the stereotype that all Mexican Americans speak Spanish originates from the fact that all Mexican Americans share a heritage from Mexico, where Spanish is spoken. Of course, as discussed earlier, this does not mean that being Mexican American necessarily means having any kind of relationship with Mexico, including having to speak Spanish. What we do learn from the idea of stereotypes is the natural way in which we as human beings compare ourselves. This also works at the group level: "[A] collective identity can only

be recognized and understood as such by the manner in which it differs from the collective identity of other groups. Simply put, identity definition is a comparative process" (Taylor, D. 2002: 120). In particular, racial and ethnic stereotypes are a comparison to being white. In our example of speaking Spanish, the comparison assumes that the "Mexican" aspect of Mexican American equals a fluency in Spanish, whereas a white American identity would equal a fluency in English. To take this example further would be to then ignorantly assume that the "American" part of being Mexican American is irrelevant, and that Mexican Americans either don't speak any English or that they have trouble speaking English.

> Racial stereotyping cannot be understood without reference to whiteness, the racially unmarked, normative centre from which it stems…central to the way in which racial stereotyping is conceived as a boundary-maintenance practice…of designating and reifying cultural "difference" (Taylor, G. and Spencer, S. 2004: 91).

This does not mean that only persons who identify as white are those who use or believe in stereotypes. Stereotypes can occur within group membership, such as the belief by some Mexican Americans that all Mexican Americans, regardless of region or experiences, must be able to speak Spanish in order to qualify as being a "true" Mexican American. As discussed on the section on language, there is some truth to this stereotype since Spanish is an extremely important part of many circles of Mexican American identity. However, the fallacy of this stereotype is that it does not apply to all circles, nor does there exist any "true" definition of Mexican American identity.

What further complicates Mexican American identity is the confusion surrounding the combined use of both ethnic identity and national identity at the same time. It is impossible for Mexican Americans to have one without the other. On the one hand, many Mexican Americans have an American national identity since they do not

have many, if any, ties to Mexico. On the other hand, what makes them different from all the other Americans is the ethnic importance of Mexico in terms of historical heritage. "Since…national identity is necessarily selective and must be relatively simple to achieve its intended purposes…a definition of national identity runs the risk of oversimplifying it and glorifying the role of some groups and denigrating that of others" (Song, M. 2003: 231). Since stereotypes are based on a concept of whiteness, and in the United States comparisons are to white Americans, this complication of ethnic and national identities is difficult for many to understand. "For most White Americans, their European ethnic heritage is no longer central to their sense of selves or to their everyday lives. Rather, White Americans think of themselves primarily in national terms, as Americans" (Song, M. 2003: 13).

Although historically there have existed similarly complicated ethnic and national identities of white Americans of European descent, such as Irish Americans or Italian Americans, the racial difference means that the ethnic part of their identity "is optional, because they are able to invoke their ethnicity when, and in the ways, they wish. In other words, White Americans' ethnicity is purely symbolic…and its celebration is without real social costs" (Song, M. 2003: 14).

Chapter 3: Mexican American Identity

"[A] linguistic or ethnic minority is defined, first of all, by its group consciousness, collective memory and collective will to survive" (Taylor, G. and Spencer, S. 2004: 200).

Now that chapter 2 has given us a solid understanding of the path towards identity creation, let us take a closer look at the specific creation of the Mexican American identity. In order to fully understand all of the complicated pieces of this identity we have to begin with the historical background of the Southwest region of the current day United States. It is fairly common knowledge that the "Mexican American War" gave this territory, originally belonging to Mexico, over to the United States. However, to fully understand Mexican American identity we must begin further back in time to have a thorough knowledge of the historical significance and influences upon this specific group.

HISTORY

Mexico was originally occupied by various indigenous tribes, the most well known of whom were the Aztecs. The Aztecs are generally considered the largest and strongest of the Indian tribes of early Mexico, with controlling power in the capitol at Tenochtitlán. However, this meant that there were many competing enemy tribes who came close to overthrowing the Aztecs for controlling power (Meier, M. S. and Ribera, F. 1972, 1993: 10-19). Eventually, due to disease and alliances with these enemy tribes, Mexico and the Aztecs were all conquered by the Spanish in the early 1500s.

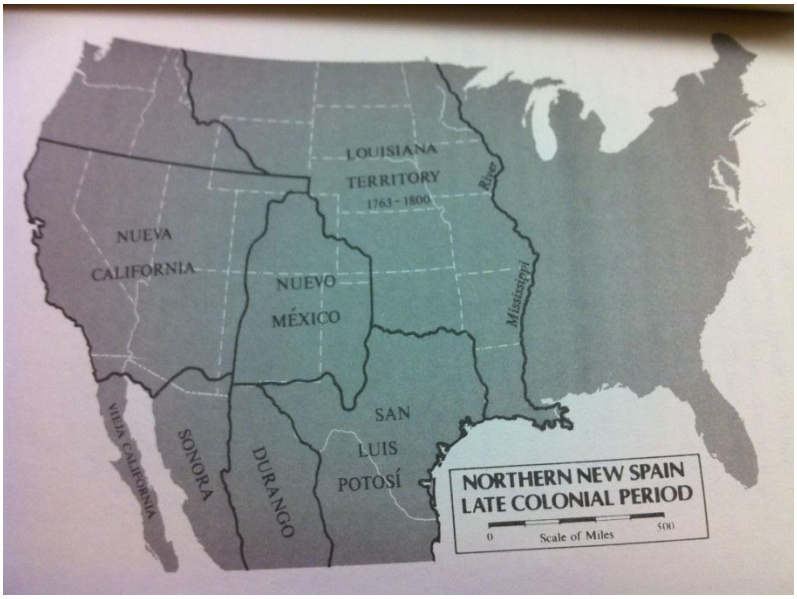

Figure 1: Northern New Spain in the late Colonial Period (Meier, M. S. and Ribera, F. 1972, 1993: 25)

"Mixed Race"

As the Spaniards and native Indians from all of the tribes began living together, they created the first Mexican people, along with the first piece of Mexican American identity. By combining the "white" racial background of the Spanish with the native Indian racial background, there existed the first mestizos, or mixed people. This means that Mexicans today come from a mixed race background, which is ironic considering past attempts to classify "Mexican" as its own race over the course of history.

Of course, following the stereotype that race is biological, all human beings are "mixed race" if you go far back enough in time. For example, when "a White-looking [person] argue[s] for her right to claim a multiracial identity based on her Black ancestry some generations back" (Song, M. 2003: 61) the question occurs: "But how many generations back should one go?...The existence of multiracial people requires a profound rethinking not only of existing racial categories and their legitimacy, but also of the

everyday belief that there are such things as 'pure' and distinct races." For mestizos, and later Mexicanos (Mexicans), this was an issue very early on. The Spaniards who settled into and controlled Mexico made sure to treat the mestizos as a second class, favoring "pure" Spaniards over any mixed race person.

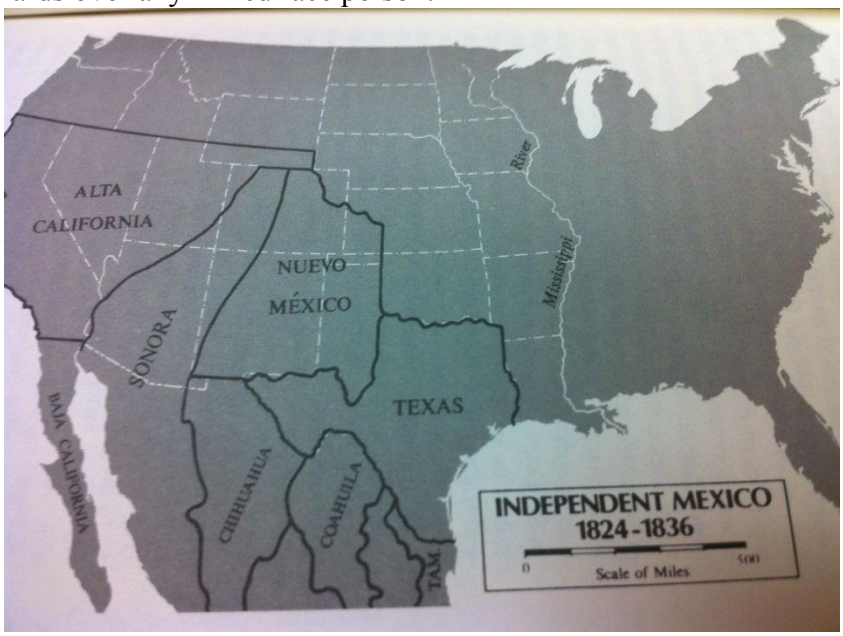

Figure 2: Independent Mexico 1824-1836 (Meier, M. S. and Ribera, F. 1972, 1993: 35)

Pride in Mexico

The Spanish would continue to control the area for many years, eventually leading to the Mexican revolution, seeking independence from Spain and which reached its climax on September 16, 1810 at the famous Grito de Dolores (Yell from Dolores) (Meier, M. S. and Ribera, F. 1972, 1993: 28-29). On this day Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a criollo ("pure" Spanish person born in New Spain, or Mexico) rallied the Indians and the mestizos under the banner of La Virgen de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe; The Virgin of Guadalupe; The Virgin Mary), eventually overthrowing the Spanish. For this reason you will often see Diez y Seis (sixteen) celebrations in the

United States, celebrating Mexican independence on September the sixteenth. This is not to be confused with the Cinco de Mayo (May fifth) celebrations one can also find in the United States, which actually only signifies the climax of a minor event in Mexican history, independence from French invasion in 1862 (Meier, M. S. and Ribera, F. 1972, 1993: 78). Although a study of the reasons why Cinco de May has become so popular in the United States can be found in the book *El Cinco de Mayo: An American Tradition* (Hayes-Bautista, D. E., 2012), the implications for this paper of this anomaly remind us some of the reasons why Mexican national pride is so important to so many Mexican Americans. These celebrations are reminders of a shared history that reflects more on Mexican American identity than it does on having an actual relationship with a nation, the country of Mexico.

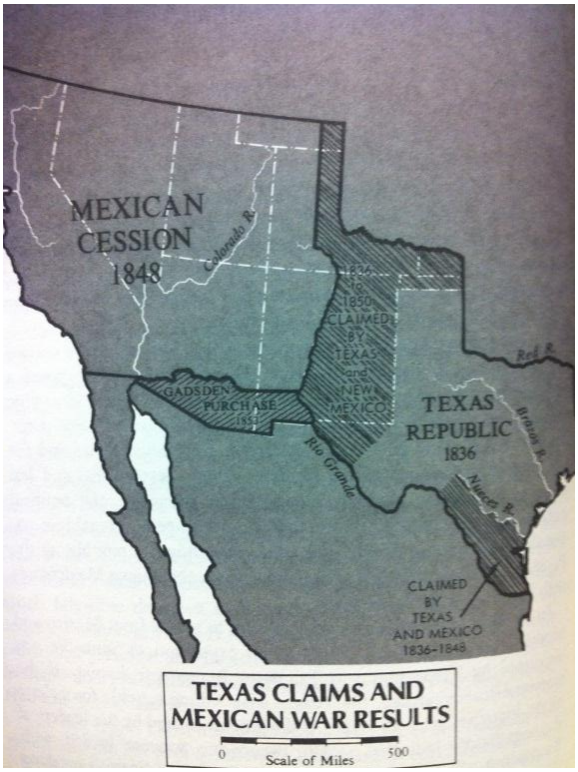

Figure 3: Texas Claims and Mexican War Results (Meier, M. S. and Ribera, F. 1972, 1993: 60)

Manifest Destiny: Race vs. Nationality

Soon after the Diez y Seis Mexican revolution occurred Anglo Americans in the United States began heading west. Manifest Destiny "was a peculiarly Anglo American version of the concept of a chosen people," the idea that all the land west of the Mississippi River was destined to be settled by Americans, a God given right to the land regardless of the fact that most of it was owned by Mexico (Meier, M. S. and Ribera, F. 1972, 1993: 55). As more and more Americans immigrated to the Mexican controlled territory of Texas, conflict and skirmishes occurred over the rights to property. By settling in Texas these American immigrants became Texans, Texans who neither wanted

to abide by the laws of Mexico, where they lived, nor respect the property rights of the Mexicans, or Tejanos, who had been living there for generations before.

> Many of the Americans were illegal aliens who had migrated from the slaveholding South...Increasingly they saw themselves as on the way to becoming subjects of a country that they were convinced was politically and morally inferior to their own (Meier, M. S. and Ribera, F. 1972, 1993: 56-57).

Since slavery was illegal in Mexico many of the Texans were openly breaking Mexican law. This led to many battles, which led to poor planning and loss of resources on the Mexican side. Unfortunately, the Mexican government was too far removed from the Texas region to be effective.

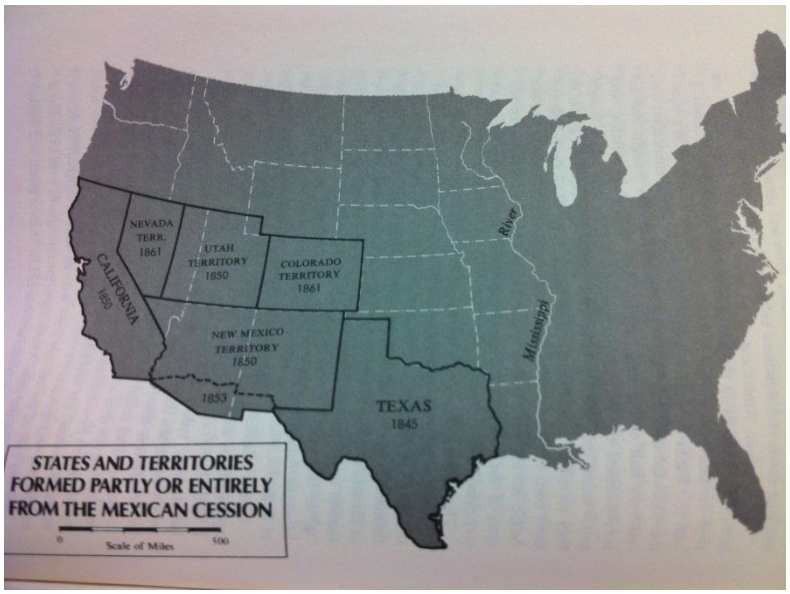

Figure 4: States and Territories Formed Partly or Entirely From the Mexican Cession (Meier, M. S. and Ribera, F. 1972, 1993: 80)

This ultimately resulted in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, giving up the Mexican territory of what is now the Southwestern region of the United States, including what is present day Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, half of

Colorado, and Texas. The history of this area of the United States is unique in the way it changed the identity status of 80,000 people overnight, the first Mexican Americans. Once a part of Mexico, the land and all of its people became a part of the United States. This had a significant impact on the residents of the area, particularly for those Tejanos, the Mexican Texans, who were not Anglo American Texans. “Both sides saw the conflict as not just a fight for territory but as a struggle between two 'races,' cultures and religions” (Meier, M. S. and Ribera, F. 1972, 1993: 68). Where once nationality had been a clear marker of racial identity, where the mixed race Mexicans were from Mexico and where the white American Texans were from the United States, now the boundary had moved. Now there existed both Mexicans and Anglos as supposed equal citizens of the United States. Although the Treaty provided that all residents of Texas and the Southwest would become United States citizens, racial prejudice only increased tensions, especially between the Anglo Texans and the Tejanos. “[L]oyal Mexican families were driven from their homes, their treasures, their cattle and horses and their lands, by an army of reckless, war-crazy people...These new people distrusted and hated the Mexicans, simply because they were Mexican” (Montejano, D., 1987, 2009: 27). Despite the legal protections provided by the Treaty, the new Mexican Americans were not treated by their new national identity, their new American status and all the rights and privileges that should have been accorded to them. Instead, they were treated based on the racial identity of their previous nation, the identity of the “Mexican race.” By moving the boundaries and placing Mexican residents into the United States “Mexican” identity suddenly became interchangeably both nationality and racial.

The newly added part of the American Southwest became an enticing location for many Anglo American settlers. Disregarding the rights of the new Mexican Americans, the Anglo settlers lied, cheated, and stole from the Mexican Americans. The Anglos

considered themselves to be racially superior, despite written law that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo claiming the Mexican Americans to be equal in national identity and rights.

> The Americans of the Texian frontiers [were], for the most part, the very scum of society- bankrupts, escaped criminals, old volunteers, who after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, came into a country protected by nothing that could be called a judicial authority, to seek adventure and illicit gains (Montejano, D., 1987, 2009: 32).

WE ARE ALL IMMIGRANTS

Ironically, these descriptions are often applied to modern day Mexican Americans, who are seen as illegal immigrants despite the fact that their families may have been in Texas or the US long before the illegal Americans came to the Southwestern part of the country (Breckinridge, B. L.D., 2011). Alternatively, modern day Mexicans may be assumed, often incorrectly, to be legal immigrants, but still immigrants nonetheless (Vasquez, J. M., 2011: 133). Either way, the assumption is that all Mexican Americans in the United States must be recent immigrants, either first or, at most, second generation to the United States. This stereotypical assumption reinforces the concept of national identity, in this case still giving preference to the "Mexican" aspect of Mexican American, but in nationality as opposed to race: "'Mexican' and 'immigrant' become one and the same…United States citizens are spotted as possible undocumented workers."

THE DIASPORA

"[E]ven if identity turns out to be an analytic fiction, it will prove to be a highly useful analytic fiction in the search for a better understanding of human experiences and behaviours" (Simon, B., 2004: 3).

> [Those minority communities] who live in host countries and don't have territorial claims are known as…diasporas. The term "diaspora…" is now widely used to characterize communities of people who left their ancestral homes and settled in foreign countries, but who preserve the memory of and links with the land of their fathers or forefathers (Taylor, G. and Spencer, S., 2004: 201).

According to the above quote, Mexican Americans are diasporic in the sense that they left their "ancestral home" of Mexico in order to live in the United States. At the same time, many do not meet these requirements to qualify as diasporic, since those Mexican families who lived in the area given over by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 did have territorial claims to their home, they did not settle in a foreign country; rather, the foreign country settled on them. Over the generations many of these families lost their land, yet they continue to preserve the memory of and links with the land of their fathers and forefathers.

Furthermore, there is a list of traits that diasporic communities tend to exhibit, many of which Mexican Americans can recognize, including: "a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time; a troubled relationship with host societies; a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries" (Cohen, 1997: 180). Mexican Americans have certainly maintained a strong ethnic group within the United States, as previously discussed through celebrations such as El Diez y Seis de Septiembre. They have also had trouble with Anglo Americans as evidenced through generations of discrimination, even from the beginning of the Treaty.

They also share a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members from other countries. Despite having original claims to the Southwest territory, many Mexican Americans receive the same discriminatory treatment as other Latin Americans in the United States, such as Puerto Ricans (also American citizens) or Cuban Americans. Despite the fact that all may speak Spanish with different accents and in different ways, the fact that they all speak one form of Spanish or another is enough for ignorant

Americans to place them all into the same category, ignoring their different origins and heritages. This is done through two different terms used in the United States.

Latino

"[T]he Latina/o category is internally divided along multiple racial lines, refracted through those categories the state officially recognizes as 'races'" (Coates, R. D. 2004: 65). This term creates a category that pulls all peoples with roots in various Latin American countries together to be the same. It also marks these people as having a racial identity which is something other than white. Mexican Americans are Latinos with roots in Mexico who are not considered white. However, this term is complicated by the fact that Mexican Americans were originally categorized as having a white racial identity by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, since one was required to be white in order to qualify for American citizenship, which the Treaty provided.

Hispanic

"In 1976, the U.S. Congress passed the only law in this country's history that mandated the collection and analysis of data for a specific ethnic group: 'Americans of Spanish origin or descent'" (Passel, J. and Taylor, P., 2009) These Hispanic Americans were described as "Americans who identify themselves as being of Spanish-speaking background and trace their origin or descent from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America and other Spanish-speaking countries."

In particular, its origin is from "Hispania" or España (Spain), referencing some sort of relationship with the country of Spain. In the United States this often refers to either use of the Spanish language, or the fact that one's country of heritage was once conquered by Spain. Often, these two go together, since after a Spanish conquest the inhabitants will begin to use the Spanish language as their main language. "[A]n

ahistorical and nonsensical identity called ‘Hispanic’ that places the Indians and their former Spanish oppressors in the same census category” (Passel, J. and Taylor, P., 2009: 21). Hispanic attempts to give a person a generic ethnic identity, free of race, mostly based on the loosely common historical experience of being conquered by Spain. “[T]he panethnic category ‘Hispanic’ [is] a term which can carry pejorative connotations in the USA. The category ‘Hispanic’ includes people of diverse origins” (Song, M. 2003: 28).

US Census History

(See Appendix A)

Of course, given that Hispanics are indeed so diverse, the 2010 US Census combined the traditional definitions of both “Latino” and “Hispanic” to be interchangeably the same, which does not really help and only serves to create greater confusion:

> The terms "Hispanic" or "Latino" refer to persons who trace their origin or descent to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Spanish speaking Central and South America countries, and other Spanish cultures. Origin can be considered as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. People who identify their origin as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race (Hispanic Origin, 2010).

“[Another] approach defines a Hispanic or Latino as a member of an ethnic group that traces its roots to 20 Spanish-speaking nations from Latin America and Spain itself (but not Portugal or Portuguese-speaking Brazil)” (Passel, J. and Taylor, P., 2009).

As previously mentioned, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo technically defined Mexican Americans as racially white. Then, in 1930, the federal census listed “Mexican” as a distinct racial category (Coates, R. D. 2004: 68). “In 1950 and 1960, the [ethnic identity] ‘Hispanic’ category emerged, later amended in 2000 to become ‘Hispanic or Latino.’” This combination of ethnic and racial identities to form some generic group

identity rarely resonates with individuals seeking to identify with a group. "From 1950 to the present day, these Latina/o categories were to be marked in conjunction with one of the state's officially recognized racial categories." If an individual disagreed with this method, they often refused to answer this section of the census, leading to inaccurate counts.

Chicano

> "The Chicano movement was recovering a past in order to undo fragmentation and alienation by stressing our common culture and oneness. In this historical recuperation, what was emphasized was similarity: that we all speak a common language (Spanish/English/bilingualism/caló), share common cultural conditions of economic and political oppression, and a lost geography (Mexico) or a legacy of conquest" (Chabram-Dernersesian, A., 2006: 27).

The term Chicano is much more specific than Hispanic or Latino in that it only refers to Mexican Americans. It is an ethnic identity which, as discussed in Chapter 2, shares a focus on the importance of language, but in a way that is more inclusive. Unlike the arguments among various circles of the Mexican American community, Chicano recognizes that all the languages we speak are important, including the slang version of Spanish that grew out of the barrios of East Los Angeles, Caló. What is important is that it be a language that is shared in common, as with the other experiences which qualify for ethnic identity.

However, the most important aspect of claiming a Chicano identity is its historically political association. Beginning in the 1960s the Chicano Movement reached its height through college students who were determined to fight for their educational rights as American citizens.

> "Confrontation politics in the urban areas during the mid-1960s were intensified by the emergence of the 'Chicano student movement,' a campus-based phenomenon in California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and the Midwest…[S]tudents in the colleges and universities…organized

> groups…[which] struggled to increase educational opportunities for Mexican people and to establish academic programs for the study of the Mexican experience" (Gómez-Quiñones, J. 1990: 118).

The organization of these students across the country gave a strongly political aspect to ethnic identity, a way to embrace their roots but in an openly public way, "a return to an identity before domination and subjugation- a voyage back to pre-Columbian times" (Chabram-Dernersesian, A., 2006: 27). By 1969 these student organizations changed their name to El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (The Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan), better known as MECHA (Gómez-Quiñones, J. 1990: 119). "The new name signified the commitment to confront social inequities and to reject assimilation into the dominant society, commitments to be fulfilled through student militant activities both on campus and in the community."

> The political importance of this historical moment, when "we" as a people contested the dominant culture, was that Chicanos inaugurated their own modes of self-representation. Chicanos emphasized native as opposed to European origins, and they articulated publicly that we were "brown" and that "brown was beautiful." Reclaiming who we were, the Chicano movement thus created a new space to describe "ourselves" (Chabram-Dernersesian, A., 2006: 28).

Although the Chicano Movement happened many decades ago, when an individual chooses to identify as Chicano today they are claiming a piece of that political identity. It is an ethnic identity that was chosen by the people within the group themselves, as opposed to Latino or Hispanic, which was placed upon the group. Chicano is also more specific than just Mexican American, since it references an inner circle of the Mexican American group identity, that of being someone who recognizes the historical struggle of Chicanos in the United States and who identifies as someone who will continue to fight for ethnic equality. Although today's fights may not be the militant protests of the 1960s, Chicanos continue to promote awareness of inequality when they

see it, such as the racist legislation promoted in Arizona over the last few years (Save Ethnic Studies.org, 2012).

So What Is Mexican American?

Now that we have learned how to define and create identity from Chapter 2, and have summarized the various aspects of Mexican American identity, we are able to define it as: a person with heritage in Mexico who is either born in or lives in the United States; who is a part of a larger category of racial and ethnic identities in the United States under both Hispanic and Latino; who is recognized as having racial identity that is not white, and ethnic identity that simultaneously embraces a cultural appreciation of both Mexico and the United States through national identity; who is often assumed to be recent immigrants to the United States but probably have many generations of citizenship established in the Southwest; who may choose to claim a political identity through being Chicano; who may also choose to identify regionally, such as being from Texas, or Tejano.

Chapter 4: Building a Food Identity

"In no area of biology is the relationship with the social sciences more inclusive or critical than in the nutritional sciences. –Richard Barnes (1968)" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 1)

Given the four basic classifications of identity- mental, physical, individual, and group- we can now begin a discussion towards building a food identity. In the hierarchy of human needs there is nothing more basic than the need to survive (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 21). At our very core, we must eat to continue living. "No matter what cultural variations exist in food usages, there is one universal imperative; food is fundamental for individual survival" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 21). In thinking about food identity we must begin with the individual.

HOW WE LEARN ABOUT FOOD

From Infancy

As with mental identity, we first learn about food from an individual perspective, as children. Too young to care for ourselves, as infants we are entirely dependent on our parents or caregivers to fulfill our most basic need of survival- they must feed us. In this way food also involves a group identity, that of the family structure which one is raised in:

> Primary socialization occurs mainly through the agency of the immediate family. The infant and young child are dependent on adults for what they get to eat and food is one of the basic mediums through which adult attitudes and sentiments are communicated. Children have to learn to like what is prescribed by the culinary culture in which they are raised; they have little choice in the matter other than through the refusal to eat at all (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 4).

Furthermore, children form their individual opinions of food based on their experiences in these familial group encounters:

> "Emotional responses to food develop early in childhood and are long-lasting; indeed, an infant's earliest pleasurable associations are with food…Feeding relieves unpleasant hunger pangs and produces feelings of well-being and satiety; thus babies quickly learn to equate eating with comfort" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 184).

The Rest of Our Lives

Food and Emotion

In the same way that skin color contributes to a sense of our physical identity, hunger and appetite create a biological identity relationship to food. This biological relationship then makes emotional connections within our mental identity: "Foods acquire particular associations through the circumstances in which they are commonly offered or eaten; for example, children quickly learn that sweetness equals love" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 184). By learning that the biological sensation associated with sweetness not only gives a pleasant sensation to the body, but also equates the emotional mental feeling of love, we are able to create a food identity. Simultaneously, this food identity says that by eating sweet foods we claim an identity for ourselves of a person who is loved, while the person, or culture, who provides us with the sweet food is given the identity of a person whom we love in return.

Unfortunately, we can also have negative emotional associations with food. When bored a person may eat "not because of hunger or appetite but simply for the sake of keeping occupied" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 186). This behavior is opposite of our instinctual need for survival. When a person is safe in the security of their biological survival and boredom enters their emotional field, it is possible for overeating to occur,

which may lead to low self-esteem through the mental identity of having a poor body image.

> Hunger and appetite are intimately connected to emotional needs. Emotional sensation such as yearning, craving, and compulsion give rise to patterns of eating behaviour [*sic*] which are gauged to relieve anxiety or tension, to provide security and comfort, or to provoke anger and frustration in others (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 184).

Eating due to the emotion of anxiety leads to similar results as boredom: "Butterfly stomachs leading to reduced appetite make large meals seem unappealing so that commonly, sweet high-calorie [foods] are substituted as they are more readily digestible. The emotional associations of these foods also connote comfort and reassurance" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 184). Here we see a cyclical sequence where emotion (anxiety) affects biology (reduced appetite), which then leads to an emotional desire (comfort and reassurance), which causes a biological reaction, cravings for foods which are easy to digest yet simultaneously provide comfort. This cycle can also be observed when food is offered to others due to guilt, in order to redress wrongdoing, or to give comfort in times of sadness (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 187).

Food in the Rest of Our World

These examples of food and emotion show how a food identity, the perceived identity associated with eating a specific food, implicates all four of the basic classifications of identity. Yet there are additional ways that we learn about food than just the emotional interactions we learn as children which affect our adulthood. In *Researching Food Habits: Methods and Problems*, the following are listed as common ways of learning about food: a) reviews of restaurants; b) interviews with chefs; c) letters to the editor; d) editorials; e) articles by columnists; f) feature articles; g) news on certain kinds of events: the staging of competitions, the giving of prizes, the presence of

politicians at key food-based events, etc. (Macbeth, H. and MacClancy, J. 2004: 64). What this book fails to mention is how all of these methods are also easily available online. With recipes, techniques and reviews all easily searchable within seconds at our fingertips, the Internet has completely changed how Americans learn about food outside of their homes and families. Furthermore, the advent of the smartphone, tablets, and television channels dedicated to food, such as the Food Network and the Cooking Channel, make it easy to explore and experience foods previously unavailable to us. "Applications" (apps) such as Instagram, Yelp or Foodspotting allow us to photograph and share our food experiences within social networks, creating new interactions with individuals and groups alike, changing our food identities to include a much wider exposure to different foods. These are all extensions of the socialization processes we undergo as we grow older:

> Socialization describes the process by which culturally valued norms of behaviour are passed on from generation to generation. It is a life-long process; natural functions such as eating become socialized as the growing child is conditioned by customs and traditions (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 3-4).

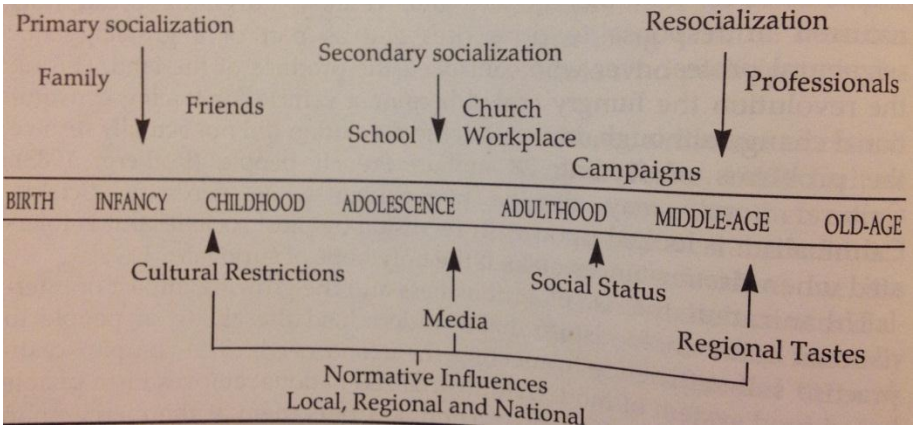

Figure 5: Socialization and the Acquisition of Food Habits (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 4)

As the "growing child" spends more time online and in front of a television they will become exposed to many foods, customs and traditions which differ from their home life. This simultaneously increases the number of definitions that child will include as a part of their food identity. To explore this concept further we will examine how the differences between cooking at home and eating out affects our food identities, which also take part in our food preferences and aversions. By examining these particular aspects of food in our lives we will see how authenticity and tradition, combined with convenience, taste exposure, and nutrition, all lead to a fuller definition of an individual's food identity.

COOKING

Nature

> [F]or humans, food can be regarded as both "nature" and "culture." The same cannot be said for any other animal. No other primate knows anything about culinary operations…No primates other than humans know how to use fire for gastronomic ends; there are no chefs in nonhuman primate societies. Only we humans have complex ways of preparing foods, which we pass on to our children (Macbeth, H. and MacClancy, J. 2004: 5).

Having established that we as individuals first learn about food as children, establishing the basis for our food identities, we will now examine those "complex ways of preparing food" which we pass on to children. As the quote above explains, food preparation, or "cooking," is a very integral part of the human experience. Even those who claim to be unable to cook are at least familiar with the concept and are at minimum able to operate a microwave, a simple way of providing for oneself and one's children to satisfy the need for survival. Yet even microwavable food has an eventual origin in nature. The food had to be grown before it could be processed and preserved into microwavable form. This

concept was also understood buy our evolutionary ancestors when they discovered fire. Although they were able to eat meats raw, "cooking improved their flavor and palatability, while many vegetable foods [were] only edible if cooked" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 66). In today's modern age technology has revolutionized the way we cook food for ourselves. "Fire" has been transformed into the stove, the microwave, and the oven. "Cooking is a universal means by which nature is transformed into culture, and categories of cooking are therefore eminently appropriate as symbols of social organization and differentiation" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 68). Eating outside of the home will be discussed in a later section. However, it is important to note that, while eating at restaurants or having food delivered are a valid means of providing for one's family, cooking at home provides a greater link to nature that allows for a stronger food identity. This is true even when it may be that all that is required is to place the food into the microwave.

Cost and Time, Or: Time Equals Money

Use of the microwave has completely changed the way Americans cook at home. Although many would agree that cooking with the freshest ingredients possible are the best choice for both nutrition and taste, most Americans do not have the luxury of time to prepare meals from scratch, every single day, multiple times per day. "She does value fresh products and traditional cooking, and her discourse clearly conveys such values. Yet it does not say anything about the food practices in her home and how they related to her family" (Macbeth, H. and MacClancy, J. 2004: 59). For busy mothers juggling a full time job as well as providing for her family, a common scenario in the United States, time is often a commodity that cannot be sacrificed. Frozen foods and microwaveable meals allow busy parents to ensure their children's basic survival in a time efficient way.

Additionally, it is often these "faster foods" which are perceived as the more affordable. "Once the time equals money equation-oriented society began to clock time and wage labor…other pursuits [such as cooking] were seen as costing time without economic productivity as a return on that investment" (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 192). Technology improved how we cooked, but where we purchase our ingredients for cooking also affects how quickly we can cook: "Domestic food consumption begins with what is bought; what is bought and what is served are in turn circumscribed by the ability to prepare the food" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 70). The most relevant space for purchasing food in the United States is the grocery store: "The roasted chicken is not to be found at a farmer's market or a community garden, two other spaces…that also compete today for a role in consumer lifestyles and identity construction" (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 190). Although "natural" and "healthy" foods can be found in all three of these spaces, the grocery store provides the saving of time from having to grow your own food while simultaneously providing other food options, such as convenience foods, which also save time: "[C]onvenience foods…[buy] time from the grocery store in an effort to provide the healthful benefits of wholesome foods to…families. Yet, time spent in the workplace is not sacrificed, thus consumers remain engaged in the fast living of industrial society."

In the case of the roasted chicken, as a convenience food it is likely to be healthier than a roasted chicken sandwich from a fast food restaurant and cheaper since it should feed a family of four for the same price that a restaurant chicken sandwich would feed only one. However, it would not have been as cheap as purchasing the chicken raw and roasting it oneself, unless the cost of time is factored in: "These time-saving foods are offered as a means of constructing identity in the kitchen and restoring a semblance of traditional family time within industrial society- that is, without sacrificing work time"

(Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 191). By balancing financial savings with saving time grocery store convenience foods provide the food identity of one who is concerned with providing healthy food that resembles something that may have taken a lot of time to make if it had been made from scratch at home. This "traditional family time" identity reflects a loving perception. Since time is costly, spending a lot of time to cook a meal gives the perception of a special occasion or that the person- or persons- who the meal is being prepared for is special. Therefore, a meal which takes a long time to make, or which is perceived as having a taken a long time, or which resembles a meal that takes a long time to make, such as convenience foods, equate to a special or loving food identity.

> By offering a relatively healthy (relative to traditional fast food) and traditional (no Styrofoam, it can go from store packaging to a serving platter in one move) pre-cooked alternative, the grocery store maintains a spatially-organized relationship between the consumer and food industry, and the worker and workplace (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 190).

> The other part of cost that affects food identity is the way it relates to choice:

> In Western society, freedom of choice is greatly prized, and to be denied a choice is nearly always viewed in a negative fashion. If one has a large array of choices then one has high status. The ability to choose freely is linked closely to economic factors; financial position has always been a measure of status and this is reflected in the goods and services which are purchased (Macbeth, H. and MacClancy, J. 2004: 81).

When purchasing food, either ingredients or convenience meals, cost will always affect which item is chosen. There will always be a more expensive option, and those who can afford these options have the choice to pick a cheaper option if they want to, whereas those with less money have no choice, they are forced to choose the cheaper option. This is also true for those who can afford more time: "[S]tatus is conferred by freedom to choose rare and costly items to impress others; by freedom to select expensive restaurants

for personal gratification; and by freedom to prepare difficult and time-consuming dishes" (Macbeth, H. and MacClancy, J. 2004: 80-81).

Recipes

Whether the dishes be difficult or easy, the way that we prepare our food comes down to the recipe we use. Sometimes they are so simple or used so often that we have them memorized in our heads. Others are written down, by hand or in a computer file, come from the television or Internet, or come out of a traditional cookbook:

> When looking at a…cookbook…ask…Who wrote this? For whom? When? Where? What position did the author hold? What local contexts can this book be fitted into? Who are the publishers? Who funded this book? What might the author have gained from producing it? What interests, beyond the immediately individual, was he or she seeking to promote? How successful was the book? What image of the…local society, and of local cooking is the author trying to portray? (Macbeth, H. and MacClancy, J. 2004: 66).

Regardless of where the recipe is located it is important to ask these questions of any recipe. They point to the various ways that food preparations lead to various food identities. In the same ways that region and group identity can affect individual identity, so can region and author identity of a recipe affect food identity.

> [A recipe] also undoubtedly has symbolic values, one of which is to connote power and control; hence the significance of secret recipes and family recipes passed from generation to generation. Refusing to disclose the recipe of an admired dish enhances the cook's status as the possessor of a special talent or power (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 72).

This shows the ways that the familial traits of a recipe are similar to the genetic, biological traits that are passed from generation to generation. Although there may be differences between the generations, the group identity of the family gives a distinct food identity through a family recipe, even if that recipe may change over the years. At the same time, "recipes can only provide a guide to how foods are prepared; they cannot

'capture the graceful art of chopping vegetables or the rhythmic kneading of bread dough. Neither can they offer the friendships that develop while learning to cook from another person'" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 71). On the one hand, the rigidity of a recipe is limiting in the way it does not fully communicate the experience of making or eating the food it describes. On the other hand, "[r]ecipes are also examples of written codified rules which require of their users both an ability and a willingness to follow the rules" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 72). For smaller group identities, such as an immediate family, willingness to follow the rules of the recipe may not be as important, since it is easy to confer with other group members when proposing changes. However, in larger group identities, such as ethnic, the set of rules of a recipe are a clear way of communicating sameness and group belonging from afar:

> Food uniquely communicates to in-and out-group members since it 'serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart…' Our understanding of what constitutes a cultural group is communicatively constructed and expressed via food (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 132).

Culture: Traditions and Authenticity

As we learned in Chapter 2 culture is very closely linked with group identity. In food identity, culture often reveals itself through a group's traditions:

> Individuals who observe codified food rules make a public demonstration of belonging to a group, and every day provide themselves with a private affirmation of identification with the group. In this way sense of belonging is constantly reinforced (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 122).

Yet, we also know that culture and identity are based on our experiences, that culture is learned from the different interactions we have in our lives. Therefore, "[c]ulture involves change; each generation, although it learns the culture it is born into, is never exactly the same as its predecessor. Culture is not static; it preserves traditions

but also builds in mechanisms for change" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 2-3). Since culture is built to change, so do our traditions. Although they are designed to stay the same over many years, over many generations, traditions are often relatively modern inventions: "[T]he reasons why people today maintain particular traditions, cloaking them in the trappings of the past, may be very different from why they or their predecessors maintained them in previous decades" (Macbeth, H. and MacClancy, J. 2004: 67). Even when written down, as a way to "preserve" the authenticity of the tradition by ensuring that it stays the same, a reader should question the source of the tradition:

> [C]ookbooks: both essential and potentially profoundly misleading…indicative of what locals ate in the time and area it was written…Some, for instance, act as deeply idealized folkloric records; the authors of these salvage ethnographies are concerned to "save" seemingly traditional recipes before they are lost. Other books are lengthy expressions of cultural nostalgia (Macbeth, H. and MacClancy, J. 2004: 65).

Traditions are generally considered the source of authenticity, something which is done repeatedly in the same way and which is unchanging. This can be said of any food which is considered to be "traditional" to a certain culture and which reflects an authentic food identity of that culture. However, when cultures and traditions are open to change, then authenticity is more fluid than it may seem.

One example of fluid authenticity is through the group identity of nationality:

> Cuisine is a term commonly used to denote a style of cooking with distinctive foods, preparation methods and techniques of eating. A national cuisine is what is, or what is thought of as, the normal or typical food of a particular country; precisely because it is "normal" it is not thought of as an expression of individuality, but rather as an aspect of group identity (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 52).

However, the normality of national food identity can be misleading. For example, in the United States foods which are considered to be the epitome of American ways were actually introduced by settlers from other lands: "As American as apple pie?- the apple pie was bought from England…North American cuisine is indeed cosmopolitan; there is a willingness to borrow from other cultures that results in a tendency toward easy acceptance of new products and techniques" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 53).

Food Habits

Americans certainly do have an easy acceptance towards new things. However, we also have our habits. One of these habits of normalcy is the structure of daily meal times. Although they may not follow it regularly, the traditional meals are expected to take place three times per day, with breakfast in the morning, lunch in the afternoon, and dinner in the evening. "Hunger is a drive which arises periodically, and people of all cultures take at least one meal in a 24-hour period. However, patterns of meal taking vary widely and are a part of cultural learning" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 63).

Another habit Americans have is the way we store extra food in our homes. Stores like Costco and Sam's Club encourage the purchase of foods in bulk, not just for feeding large families but for the convenience of not having to purchase regular items on a weekly basis, and to save on the cost by buying so many at once. Buying in bulk saves on both cost and time, yet requires Americans to have large pantries, and sometimes even a second freezer just for storage.

> The typically excessive storage of food by modern Europeans and Americans, which is usually done for overt reasons of cost-effectiveness and convenience, may [also] contain an element of security-anxiety. Certainly when food shortages threaten people are easily panicked into buying and hoarding commodities (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 192).

Sharing Food

In addition to cooking as a means of providing for our families, we also cook as a way of sharing love with those we care about. Even the act of sharing a meal that has not been cooked personally, similar to the roasted chicken convenience food, will provide the same feelings of closeness among those sharing the meal: "Food is a universal medium for expressing sociability and hospitality" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 83). Beyond the family group identity, when friends share food, either by inviting others over to their home or by going out to a restaurant together, it is a way of acknowledging the shared group identity of their friendship. Thus, the food identity of a shared meal takes on friendship:

> Food exchanges can also be ways of expressing friendship while maintaining economic parity; exchanges can diffuse the status meanings of a food event. Thus wine may be given in exchange for a meal, an arrangement which allows guests to contribute and to establish a feeling of mutual friendship, while relieving some of the economic burden placed on the hosts (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 89).

A similar effect can be found among strangers sharing food with each other. For example, airlines who provide food for their passengers act the way hosts do who have invited friends, or guests, over to share food. In this way airlines hope that the food identity of their food service conveys friendship to their passengers:

> Meeting passengers' hunger needs is only one goal of airline food service…the routinized appearance of drinks, snacks and meals marks the passage of time in an environment where few other temporal markers are available. Food also relieves boredom and monotony on long flights…food service [also] helps to keep passengers in their seats and out of the way of the cabin crew…But most importantly food service conveys all the messages normally expected of a host catering to guests (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 224).

EATING OUT/FAST FOOD

We've discussed why cooking at home is one of the most common methods of feeding ourselves in the United States. Whether it be from scratch or through convenience foods, cooking not only saves money but is an act of sharing with others and of giving them a special feeling. However, the act of cooking itself is not always enjoyable, particularly when it must be done every day on a regular basis. This is similar to adults who are required to attend their jobs, although most will usually get a day off, while feeding, even if it just the self, must occur constantly: "[T]he illusion that cooking is a creative pleasure when in fact it should be classed as work- work which is neither recognized as such nor paid" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 114). For meal providers, whether it be for the self or parents for a family, being able to eat out at a restaurant is similar to the cook's "day off" (although it is usually only one meal off and not an entire day of eating away from the home). However, since cost and time continue to be a primary issue for many Americans, it is the fast food restaurant that is a top choice for many families: "The prime target for fast-food restaurants is the family unit…it introduces children to the culture of fast food. Families are increasingly hard-pressed in a fast-paced consumer society to find time for all their desired pursuits" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 211). In this sense fast food can be associated with the food identity of being a savior of sorts, of liberation for the cook from their work, and liberation from time constraints to pursue other activities. Fast food is both faster and cheaper than eating out at a non-fast food restaurant, and faster than cooking at home. It is not usually cheaper than cooking at home, but when one factors in the "work" of constant cooking it is often worth the cost.

Unfortunately, when fast food becomes the norm then it is no longer cost effective, not only in price but also in nutritional value, and in the new habits it can create for family members:

> One consequence of the ready availability of supposedly cheap food outside of the home is a devaluation in the importance of cooking skills…Fast-food restaurants in North America are commonly open around the clock. People can eat when they want and are no longer confined to traditional mealtimes…family members can eat alone at different times to suit their busy schedules. It is therefore not unreasonable to claim that the fast-food restaurant has done its part to contribute to the disruption of family eating practices (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 212).

In response to fast food becoming overly popular world-wide, the Slow Food Movement was launched in 1986 out of Italy as a way of resisting fast foods and creating a space for its members to recreate their food identities by reconnecting with food and nature (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 75).

> Slow Food members believe that people should purchase goods that are both locally based and reflect the diversity of the regions in which they live…They assert that by buying organic foods and visiting farmer's markets, they not only support their local economies, but also will help to ensure that they consume high-quality goods that reflect cultural diversity of taste. Yet, they also advance that people should take the time necessary to prepare these foods (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 78).

PREFERENCES AND AVERSIONS

> Food preferences function as a means of assessing the acceptability of foods, preference implying a degree of like or dislike. Preference also implies an expressed choice rather than merely a willingness to eat a food and preferences may indeed differ from actual consumption patterns. Foods may be accepted even though they are not preferred, for reasons of availability, cost or social courtesy (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 194).

Regardless of where or how quickly the food is prepared, everyone can claim a food preference, to desire one food over another, or a food aversion. For children all foods are new the first time they are encountered, so, like culture, their preferences are

mostly learned: "Simple exposure to foods is a key elements in [a child's] acceptance. All foods are initially unfamiliar to a child, who must learn what they taste like and that they are safe to eat…a minimum of eight to ten exposures is [suggested] before a child accepts a food" (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 195). Even though these preferences are based on an individual basis, cultural group identity can often have an influence on the individual's food identity:

> The study of human food preferences is indeed an area for cross-disciplinary discussion…as biochemical processes and life experiences interrelate in the formation of each individual's preferences and aversions…Even supposedly purely biological aspects cannot be separated from culturally learned and individual psychological experiences (Macbeth, H. and MacClancy, J. 2004: 101).

Although the individual's body can have a physical reaction to food aversions, it is often the mental food identity of the aversion that causes this reaction:

> Food aversions, including strong physical feelings of disgust, are the opposite of food preferences. Socially and culturally induced food preferences and aversions can become unconsciously integrated in the physiological reactions of the individual…while previous biological experiences, such as a coincident sickness…can become part of the cognitive attitudes in question (Macbeth, H. and MacClancy, J. 2004: 102).

These preferences and aversions are often based on the taste or smell of a food, but can also be affected texture or visual image (Macbeth, H. and MacClancy, J. 2004: 103). Yet, apart from biology or culture, financial status can also have an effect. Since preference requires that more than one choice be available so that one choice may be preferred over the other, a lack of choices can eliminate the opportunity for preferences. Or, when a choice is made suddenly available, then the preference will be for the item which was available before the choice appeared:

> [P]overty allows no, or almost no, choice…the poor [express] a 'preference' for the food item[s] that they…eat, and not for some rare treat. Preferences, therefore can only affect choices when choices exist or can be afforded, but preferences can

> still be expressed in the absence of choice. In contrast, it is common for more affluent people to seek variety and new experiences.

For example, one woman explained her approach to cooking: "I like [cooking] when I have time and when I feel like it because not all the time do I feel like cooking. But when I do feel like it, I like to make new things, something that I am learning by myself" (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 132).

NUTRITION

The last aspect of food identity to be discussed is nutritional value. "An anthropology of food…examine[s] the human relationships of a society 'as determined by nutritional needs…' how hunger shapes the sentiments which bind together the members of each social group" (Macbeth, H. and MacClancy, J. 2004: 2). We began the concept of building a food identity by recognizing that the most basic aspect of food is its role in our survival. We next acknowledged our early learning patterns through the familial group identity, which often uses cooking in the home as the favored method of exposure to foods. Issues of cost, time and habits play roles in how, when, and where we eat, all building a food identity. However, nutrition is an issue that seems to hover in the background of all of these topics. On the one hand, there is the desire for parents to provide healthy meals for their children, part of the responsibility they feel overall in protecting their children's health and well-being (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 132-133). On the other hand, the desire for taste, preferences which may have been learned through bad habits, such as too much fast food, are often in conflict with the knowledge that un-preferred foods may be better for us.

> Resocialization is an attempt to usurp old routines and practices and replace them with new ones. Typically it occurs through educational and intervention programmes designed by health professionals. Eating habits may change if

> sufficient benefit is demonstrated, though the failure rate of such change attempts is notoriously high (Fieldhouse, P. 1985, 1995: 5).

Unfortunately, the "American diet consists largely of processed foods, and many Americans don't interrogate the origin or production process of what they eat" (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 297). This is partly what the American Slow Food Movement hopes to change by encouraging people to shop at Farmer's Markets or to "buy local," since these shopping methods are more likely to provide healthier foods. Yet, as discussed in the different ways we learn about food, television and technology also affect the ways we think we understand our food: "Through portion sizes, full menus that nearly always include desserts, and food as entertainment and pleasure, the Food Network promotes excessive food consumption. In addition, the food consumed is usually prepared in high-fat ways" (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 326). The nutritional food identity may be something that we are taught is important as children and for which we feel a responsibility towards when providing for our own children, but for Americans, it rarely becomes the primary aspect of identity.

SO WHAT IS A FOOD IDENTITY?

In the same ways that self identity consists of mental, physical, individual and group aspects, food identities also interact with our worlds. The way we perceive a food based on these four aspects will create the base for the identity of that food, both its identity to us as well as our identity towards it. The choices we make in deciding what to eat, where to eat it, how to make it, and with whom to share it with combine to build upon that food identity. Through various cultural group identities we learn about a food's authenticity and tradition, yet we also learn that these can change. Through busy

American lifestyles we learn that cost and time are important factors, either in choosing convenience foods to save money and time, or in deciding to spend extra money and time in order to show additional affection. Furthermore, nutrition, although often neglected, will also build upon a food identity.

A food identity builds upon the aspects of self identity through concepts of authenticity, tradition, convenience, taste exposure and nutrition.

Chapter 5: Mexican American Food Identity

Now that we have established that a food identity builds upon the aspects of self identity through concepts of authenticity, tradition, convenience, taste exposure and nutrition, we can apply these aspects towards a specifically Mexican American self identity: a person with heritage in Mexico who is either born in or lives in the United States; who is a part of a larger diaspora of racial and ethnic identities in the United States under both Hispanic and Latino; who are assumed as having a racial identity that is not white, and ethnic identity that simultaneously embraces a cultural appreciation of both Mexico and the United States through national identity; who may be either an immigrant to the United States or have many generations of citizenship; who may choose to claim a political identity through being Chicano; who may also choose to identify regionally, such as being from Texas, or Tejano.

It is heritage which makes the key difference here. Although Mexican immigrants in the United States bring their Mexican heritage with them to their American experience, the difference for many Mexican Americans is that they simultaneously embrace a Mexican heritage as well as an American heritage as part of their identity. Living in the United States is not just an experience, it is a defining part of who they are. Many Mexican immigrants may claim a Mexican identity even after having lived most of their lives in the United States. On the other hand, many Mexican Americans take pride in their Mexican heritage even if they have never set foot in the country of Mexico. It is this heritage which makes Mexican American identity unique, and it is this same dual identity which also makes Mexican American food unique. Although there is no official

definition of what counts as "Mexican American" food, it is similarly unique in identity in that it is often composed of both Mexican and American influences.

In order to have a better understanding of these influences and how they build towards a Mexican American food identity, we must begin with a history of the food. In the same way that understanding the history of Mexican American people builds on the definition of Mexican American identity, understanding the history of Mexican and Mexican American food will help us to understand its food identity. From this history we can then discern a difference between what is understood as "traditionally Mexican" food versus Mexican American food, including differences in region and between recipes.

A Brief History of Mexican and Mexican American Food

"This is food that has its roots in the prehistoric soil of Mexico but has branched out, survived, and flourished in this modern world" (Tausend, M. with Ravago, M. 1997: 15).

As discussed in the history of Mexican American people, Mexicans were created when the Spanish conquered the Aztecs at Tenochtitlán and began to mix with the indigenous peoples of early Mexico, which included the southwestern part of the current United States: "Many of us are unaware that even before the English colonized Jamestown, Virgina, in 1607, the forebears of many Mexican Americans were a presence in the western part of the country" (Tausend, M. with Ravago, M. 1997: 27). This Spanish influence was also present in the creation of Mexican foods: "They…blended European foods with the native foods of the region: corn and oats, as well as wild cattle, hogs and sheep (Napier, K. 2005: 322-323). These blendings created what we recognize today as some of the most authentic and traditional Mexican recipes, such as the popular dessert "[f]lan…[which] traces at least one culinary root to Spain and Portugal, where, in

turn, the love of this sweet, caramel-flavored custard is traced to the Moors and before that to the Romans," or the ubiquitous condiment known as salsa:

> The Spanish first encountered the tomato after their conquest of Mexico in the early 1500s; there they learned that Aztec lords combined tomatoes with chili peppers and ground squash seeds for use as a condiment on turkey, venison, lobster, and fish. This combination was subsequently called "salsa" (Napier, K. 2005: 323).

Even cattle farming and a love of beef, which is so strongly embraced as a uniquely Texan and American experience, began with the Spaniards: "Texas cattle ranches were started on land given to Mexican families by the king of Spain." As we explore regional differences we will encounter more historical influences such as these, particularly in the sections on Spanish and Tex-Mex food. Overall, it is important to remember that, like the self identity, Mexican American food has its roots in Mexican food, which has its origins in the blending of both Spanish and indigenous foods.

The Difference Between Mexican and Mexican American Food

"Who ate the first taco? How was it prepared? How much did it cost" (Chávez, D. 2006: 12)?

In the same way that the definition of what constitutes "authentic" "Mexican" food can be debated, Mexican American food is dependent on the identity of the people who eat it, along with region. Most would agree that authentic Mexican food is that which is most commonly eaten by Mexican people, those who claim a Mexican identity, while in the country of Mexico, making region equally important. Furthermore, within the country of Mexico food will vary from region to region, making it difficult to discuss a "national food" without region. We can therefore define Mexican American food as that which is most commonly eaten by Mexican American people in various regions of the United States. Yet, since Mexican American identity is based on a Mexican heritage,

Mexican American food must rely on an American influence in order to keep its unique identity distinctly different from that of Mexican food.

"American" Food

The United States is a country made up entirely of immigrants. This means that the food of all of these different peoples all contribute towards what we think of as "American" food. As mentioned in Chapter 4, "American apple pie" actually comes from England. Along with inheriting cattle ranching from the Spanish came the inheritance of "American barbeque." Yet, one can learn from the Slow Food Movement that modern fast food and convenience foods are typically American inventions that have spread to the rest of the world, and which they are trying to fight against. Since we know that time and cost are so important to the American consumer and family, it makes sense that these foods have emerged as a product of the American experience. As with our definition of Mexican and Mexican American foods, "American" foods can be said to be those which are most commonly eaten by Americans while in the United States.

Interestingly, reliance on American influence reinforces Mexican American identity by the exact process of taking Mexican food and combining it with an American experience. For example, Franco Mondini-Ruiz tells the story of a Mexican American lunch, where typically American tuna sandwiches- which are quick and cheap to make- are served not only with American potato chips- yet another fast/convenience food- but also with "Mexican" refried beans and fresh Mexican cheese (Mondini-Ruiz, F. 2005: 31; See Appendix C). We will discuss in a later section why refried beans are not a Mexican food. However, the blending of common Mexican foods with American fast and convenient lifestyle and foods in this lunch is further emphasized in the dessert: an

American Sara Lee cheesecake- convenience food- topped with mangos, a Mexican fruit, marinated in rum and cinnamon, which is a common practice in Mexico.

Since Mexican American foods are those eaten by Mexican Americans while in the United States, Mexican American food identity also includes foods which are normally considered simply "Mexican" or "American." Including these "traditional" foods reinforces the complexity involved in a dual identity, the idea that a hyphenated "Mexican-American" is a combination, but that Mexican American, separated, also includes the individual parts. Thus, a peanut butter and jelly taco, which takes the Mexican tortilla and combines it with American peanut butter and jelly, could be considered a "Mexican-American" food.

"Chinese" Food

Yet a cookbook also includes the de-hyphenated "Mexican American" food "Mexican beef chow mein." This dish is neither a traditionally Mexican food nor a traditionally American food, thus the de-hyphenation, but it is still Mexican American because it is using both Mexican and American influences by Mexican Americans in the United States. As the old saying goes, if we actually are what we eat, then "does going to a Chinese restaurant in the United States say more about Chinese or American culture" (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 195)? By examining the history of Chinese restaurants in the United States we will have a better understanding of how this seemingly Chinese-Mexican recipe came to be.

In 1848 the California gold rush bought the first wave of Chinese immigrants to the United States (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 199). As more and more Chinese minors arrived the availability of Chinese food in the United States grew: "In search of cheaper, faster, and/or more exciting food options, Americans have

often set aside their ethnic and cultural prejudices aside to experience other culinary traditions." By the 1870s non-Chinese Americans were used to eating Chinese food as a cheap and quick food option, solving the American problem of cost and time. Unfortunately, racial prejudices began to lessen the popularity of Chinese food, reaching its peak in 1882 with the Chinese Exclusion Act (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 200). Drastically losing business, Chinese restaurants began looking for ways to re-attract their non-Chinese customers, becoming increasingly competitive (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 201). In order to adapt they began refurbishing

> "their establishments with gaudy lanterns, colorful wall decorations, and bright red facades to match non-Chinese Americans' stereotypical image of the 'Orient…' In the quest for a 'familiar-yet-exotic' menu, [they] began inventing and serving a variety of ingeniously concocted 'Chinese' dishes that used local ingredients and catered to American tastes" (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 201).

As these Americanized Chinese restaurants grew in popularity many first and second generation Chinese Americans expanded into other ethnic community neighborhoods, applying the same technique of combining Chinese flavors with their stereotypes, yet keeping them familiar to local tastes (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 202-203). This is where we see the first "Chinese-Mexican dish," "General Tso's Pollo:" "For many newly-arrived immigrants during and after the Second World War, eating at Chinese restaurants was a way of forging a new American identity and was an initiation into American culture" (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 203). At this point Chinese food was actually American food, created to cater to American tastes. Therefore, as the Americanized Chinese food reached out to the Mexican and Mexican American communities, it was not Chinese-Mexican but American-Mexican, or Mexican American food.

Furthermore, it is not surprising that Mexican influences would blend well with Chinese food, since both of these ethnic communities underwent similar experiences living in the United States:

> Chinese restaurant culture in the United States is essentially American…[A] parallel of this inconsistency (that is, what Americans think Chinese food and foodways are versus what they actually are) can be drawn with how Chinese Americans are perceived as perpetual foreigners in the United States, when in fact they are long-standing Americans who have been in the United States for many generations (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 197).

By acknowledging Chinese food as a part of the Mexican American experience we not only acknowledge how important American food is to the Mexican American food identity, but also the importance of how varied American food can be. "[T]he total number of Chinese restaurants in the United States has now surpassed the combined number of McDonald's, Wendy's, and Burger King franchises…U.S. Chinese restaurants are surely an integral part of the American eating experience" (Cramer, J. M., Greene, C. P., and Walters, L.M. 2011: 204).

"Spanish" Food

We have already discussed how the Spanish had influence on creating the traditional Mexican foods we are familiar with today. However, there are still some recipes which are claimed to be only Spanish and not Mexican at all. The most common of these is "Spanish rice." While there is such a thing as Spanish rice in Spain, most people in the United States confuse the term to apply to what is actually Mexican rice:

> Mexicans can never make Spanish rice; they can only make Mexican rice. Mexicans can make arroz al estilo Español [(Spanish style rice)] but really what they make best is their own rice. Many people won't admit to being Mexican. They consider themselves Spanish. What can I say? This has led to a confusion of rice among other things (Chávez, D. 2006: 77).

Part of the reason why this confusion of terms was created is due to the confusion between racial and ethnic identity. As we learned in Chapters 2 and 3, Mexican American is an ethnic identity that recognizes a racial identity of being other than white. It is this non-white racial identity which leads many Mexican Americans to claim a purely Spanish heritage in the desire to claim a white racial background, ignoring the indigenous side of Mexican ethnicity and race. This confusion of ethnic identity then carries over to confusion in food identity: "Spanish rice is food racism at its not so subtlest. There's nothing Spanish about it except that people who speak Spanish make it. My Mother was Mexican through and through. There is still no rice like hers" (Chávez, D. 2006: 76).

A closer look at the history of Mexican rice makes the distinction even clearer. When African slaves were brought to Mexico they took with them "pocketfuls of rice from their native lands" (Tausend, M. with Ravago, M. 1997: 233). As they escaped they would then grow that rice and use it to sustain their families, thus introducing African rice to Mexico.:

> Most of the rice used in Mexico today is the starchier medium-grain variety, not the short-grain rice of Spain and Italy…[B]y the 1800s long-grain rice from Georgia and Carolina was welcomed by the Spanish and Mexican frontiersmen. Before long, settlers on the broad prairie lands of southeastern Texas began growing and selling their own crops of rice, and ever since then rice has been an important part of Mexican-American cooking, calming the aggressive taste of chiles (Tausend, M. with Ravago, M. 1997: 233).

While there is such as a thing as Spanish rice, in the United States, particularly in the southwest, you are much more likely going to encounter Mexican rice.

"Tex-Mex" Food

"Tex-Mex," a shortened version of "Texas-Mexican," is often used in the United States the way the term "Mexican food" is used, meaning, to reference any food with any kind of influence from Mexico. Since Texas is now a part of the United States, many

people will use Tex-Mex to signify Americanized versions of Mexican food as opposed to what they might consider "authentic" Mexican food. However, for those living in Texas Tex-Mex is neither Mexican nor Americanized Mexican food, it is its own unique food identity:

> Tex-Mex food is what most non-Mexican Americans consider Mexican food, but it is not. It is Rio Grande border food- a blending of Native American ingredients: corn, pinto beans, squash, cactus, and chiles, with the meat and cheese sources introduced by the Spaniard frontiersmen. Soon came the wheat for flour tortillas, rice, and then a few of the traditional Mexican foods, such as the tamales favored by the Tlaxcalan Indians of central Mexico, who as co-conquerors of the Aztecs came north with the Spaniards and colonized the area around Saltillo in northern Mexico and parts of Texas. (Tausend, M. with Ravago, M. 1997: 66).

As we shall see in the next section, region is a very important aspect in creating unique food identities.

REGIONS

Although the term "Mexican food" is used throughout the United States to refer to any food that may have some sort of Mexican influence, the reality is that even "generic" Mexican food varies from region to region within the U.S. This is particularly visible when, for example, someone who has encountered *bizcochitos*, a flat and crunchy pastry, in New Mexico is confused that the dessert is not equally popular in Texas (Sewell Linck, E. and Gobson Roach, J. 1952, 1989: 76). As Denise Chávez, a New Mexico native illustrates, even the understanding of the common foods "taco" and burrito is very different from state to state:

> Tacos to me are more formal than burritos and have a hard, fried tortilla shell, unless, of course, you have a soft fried taco. A burrito is softer, more thrown together, the informal cousin of the taco. In San Antonio, their tacos are my burritos, and in Wyoming, forget it: enchiladas are made with flour tortillas. So what is the difference between a burrito and a taco? Both have a filling inside, but one is wrapped in a flour tortilla, the other in a tortilla de maíz [(corn tortilla)] (Chávez, D. 2006: 51).

In Mexico, where flour tortillas are rare, people would agree with Chávez that tacos can only be served on corn tortillas, and burritos as Americans know them do not exist. Yet most Americans would argue that both tacos and burritos can be served on flour tortillas, or a taco could be served on a corn tortilla if so desired. However, regional differences continue beyond the type of tortilla. The method of plating the overall dish, either folded, rolled, or flat, also changes.

In Mexico traditional tacos, such as those served by street vendors, are usually served flat since the corn tortillas are so small that they can only remain in a folded position of they are stacked tightly against each other. Yet, once the taco is picked up it will be eaten in a folded position, cupped together within the hand.

If you consult the "Essential Tex-Mex Vocabulary" (See Appendix B), you will see that in Texas what Chávez describes as a taco would actually be considered a flauta, whereas a burrito requires that it not only be rolled up but also have the ends of the tortilla tucked in (Napier, K. 2005: 324). Unlike Chávez' description of a burrito, being placed in a flour tortilla is not enough.

Yet Chávez understands that regional differences exist, and, unlike the man with the biscochitos, she owns those differences by adding them to her food identity:

> The word taco is not understood by all, and it can mean different things in different places…[I]n Mississippi tacos are called "bend-ups." We never ate folded tacos at our house; they were always rolled. I did eat folded tacos elsewhere, and while I consider them tacos, they aren't my tacos (Chávez, D. 2006: 105).

Author Marilyn Tausend is to be applauded for her work in making clear the regional differences of both Mexican and Mexican American food. Although Tausend herself does not come from a Mexican heritage, she grew up around Mexican migrant workers as a child since her father was a produce distributor. In a journey to rediscover

the foods of her childhood her writing presents a very thorough collection of recipes as she traveled extensively in order to present the whole picture of Mexican and Mexican American foods. For example, in *Cocina de la Familia* (Tausend, M. with Ravago, M. 1997) she recognizes the importance of regional differences by including "impressions" of 12 different states: New Mexico, California, Texas, Arizona, Illinois, Colorado, Washington, Michigan, Florida, New York, Oregon and Idaho. These impressions include brief historical backgrounds of the area, notes on the Mexican American population, such as immigrant patterns or, in the case of the border states, the number of generations families have been in the area, and stories of the people she met and cooked with there. The impressions allow her to note the various ways that Mexican Americans may have changed their cuisine from that of their Mexican grandparents, often through necessity.

Tausend replicates this process in *Savoring Mexico* (Tausend, M. 2001, 2006). This collection is inclusive of multiple regions throughout Mexico, emphasizing the importance of regional differences in Mexican cuisine. Each recipe is accompanied by the state it originated from, and she is quick to offer background information on the recipe if it is common in multiple regions but perhaps more well known or unique to the region listed. In addition to these individual anecdotes she also offers a historical background of each section of the cookbook, explaining how certain ingredients or cooking methods may have been introduced from the Spanish or French, or what the modern day traditions may be in serving in a restaurant as opposed to at home. She is further able to add to this background by sharing her own stories of traveling throughout the country, showing how she experienced these foods first hand.

RECIPES

"You name it, a tortilla can hold it" (Chávez, D. 2006: 52).

Since we acknowledged in Chapter 4 that food identity is learned as a child and therefore is most influenced by what family cooks at home, it makes sense that recipes are at the heart of our food identities. For Mexican Americans, there are four aspects to recipes that are particularly important to Mexican American food identity: region and language we have already discussed; there is also the importance of family, and the physical act of cooking itself:

> Let's get one thing straight: Mexican food takes a certain amount of time to cook. If you don't have the time, don't cook it. You can rush a Mexican meal, but you will pay in some way…[Real Mexican] food, the most savory food, is prepared with time and love and at home. So, give up the illusion that you can throw Mexican food together. Just understand that you are going to have to make and take the time!

Generations of Family

"Since growing up I have come to realize that the essence of Mexican hospitality is to socialize with an epic-scale family of relatives and friends" (Tausend, M. with Ravago, M. 1997: 31).

Food identity in general is dependent upon family, but for "most Mexican Americans the family…[is] extended to include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins related by either blood or marriage. It is through this larger family that the Mexican customs and culinary heritage are being preserved" (Tausend, M. with Ravago, M. 1997: 18). For many Americans family is only a part of their food identity in early childhood, but for Mexican Americans it remains as important throughout their lives, no matter how old: "Everything in my life then was family…And so to understand what tacos mean to me, you need to understand what family is and was" (Chávez, D. 2006: 20). Tausend explains that much of this has to do with the way that Mexican Americans created support systems through large family networks when being "Mexican" in the United States was not an easy identity to live with: "During the many years as Mexicans became

Mexican Americans, whether by annexation or by immigration, and in times of discrimination and estrangement, they kept their past alive in their homes through the stories they told and the food they cooked" (Tausend, M. with Ravago, M. 1997: 18).

Yet family is more than a coping mechanism or a way for traditional foods to survive; it is also the way that recipes, and traditions, change. For example, the man who asked about biscochitos of the South Texas woman was ignorant of the regional differences between Texas and New Mexico, but the woman responded anyway, saying that she did not know how to make them but that she was still familiar with them because her mother used to make them (Sewell Linck, E. and Gobson Roach, J. 1952, 1989: 76). Through her mother's exposure she became familiar with the food, but because she did not make them herself, nor did she encounter them regularly in her region, they were not a part of her food identity.

In a similar generational change, the interview reveals that she herself used to eat nopalitos, or slices of prickly pear cactus leaf pads, often when she was growing up, but that her own children found it strange to eat. In an effort to keep this cultural food in their lives she experimented with different ways of cooking the cactus until she found one that they liked.

Sazón: Cooking With Your Body

So far we have discussed most of the aspects of food identity in terms of mental and group identity, through both culture and family. However, there is a very physical aspect to food identity, and that is the act of cooking itself. Our methods of preparation and cooking, along with how we physically use the space we cook in, all contribute to bodily interactions with our food identity.

For Meredith Abarca these bodily interactions are scrutinized as the differences between a kitchen as "place" and a kitchen as "space," often identifying both in different instances for many women (Abarca, M. E. 2006). She also identifies the importance of *charlas culinarias*, or kitchen chats, as the best method of gaining accurate information from women that are true reflections of their actual experiences. By having face to face conversations which take place in the kitchen as the food as being made women were able to share honest information about everything from their food preferences to their cooking styles. The charlas allowed them to feel more comfortable and to provide more information beyond simply answering a list of questions about food. Thus charlas were an important aspect to being able to fully describe their food identities.

For example, through a charla we learn that Abarca's mother saw her kitchen as a "space" of freedom. When she was sixteen she was forced to marry due to a misunderstanding between her father and a stranger, so for the first two years of her marriage she lived with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, who treated her very poorly. When she finally had a kitchen in her own home it quickly became a space of salvation away from her mean in-laws. Her kitchen continues to be a space where she is in charge and controls the decisions, something her food identity did not include in her young married life.

Other charlas revealed women who viewed their kitchens as a "place" of work and obligation which they could not escape. Familial obligations forced them to be there every day, even if they were tired from other jobs, because every day everyone in the family must eat. Although they certainly desire to provide for their families and ensure their basic survival needs, along with encouraging their cultural inheritance, many times being in the kitchen was simply too tiring. In this way Abarca demonstrates how a

kitchen can be both a "place" that controls us as well as a "space" where we are in control.

Another interesting revelation from the charlas is the importance of *sazón,* which is literally translated as "maturity" or "ripeness," but which is described as the physical bodily interactions one has while cooking. Abarca likens the concept of sazón to the idea of a green thumb: those who are born with it have a special gift. Yet the charlas also reveal that sazón can also be achieved through experience. What is important is that sazón is not a skill that can be taught or learned, and all of the women agreed that it was an essential part of good cooking. They admitted it was possible to have sazón only for certain recipes, or even only for certain skills within cooking. It was also an important part of knowing how to measure ingredients within a recipe. None of the women used any measuring tools or could give any measurements when sharing their recipes. Instead, they could only describe understanding of measurements as an inherent "knowing," which often involved multiple senses working together. One would feel the weight of an ingredient in the palm of a hand, or of the spoon as it was stirring, to know if more was needed, or smell and taste to see if more spice was required, or see the color change of a food to know when it was ready. All of the women said they had gained these skills on their own, after years of practice. It is this bodily interaction with the practice of cooking that leads to a sazón aspect of food identity.

A NOTE ON GENDER

The previous section on sazón is particularly telling when it comes to gender and food identity. The entire discussion takes places among women, who stereotypically dominate kitchenspaces. Among Mexican American families this is often seen when

discussing family recipes, which are more often than not passed down from "abuela" (grandmother) than from abuelo (grandfather). This is not to say that men don't cook, or that Mexican American men don't cook. As in self identity gender plays a very important role in food identity. It would be very interesting to study men's roles in Mexican American families and see how their food identities are changing from the traditionally "macho Mexican man." However, that will have to be an entirely separate thesis.

CONCLUSION

We began with the basic building blocks of identity through the classifications of mental versus physical and individual versus group. In applying this definition towards Mexican American identity we recognized that, as a group, culture, dual national pride, region, history and problematic notions of race and ethnicity all combine to create a unique identity. Furthermore, the experiences of the individual will play a role towards the ways the group identity is embraced for that particular individual.

Using the same classifications we also defined food identity, using the different ways that we interact with and experience food to apply both to how we identify with a food and how a food will identify towards us. Mentally and individually, we learn preferences and aversions based on our initial exposure to foods as children. Physically we use our senses to interact with food, and often have physical reactions when encountering those foods we are averse to. As a group, whether in a family unit, through a social group, at a national level or through ethnicity, our social interactions can lead to new exposures and certain expectations with our food. In the United States, this often leads to a preference for convenience foods in order to save on time and money, which can lead to neglecting nutritional value.

For Mexican Americans in the United States, Mexican heritage plays a large role in creating a Mexican American food identity. Mexican history of Mexican foods has translated to Mexican American food experiences and expectations, yet American notions of cost and time have also altered cooking styles and preparation for many Mexican Americans. As in Mexico, regional differences in the United States lead to different Mexican American food identities in different parts of the country. Yet family is always a constant factor of importance to some degree for Mexican Americans. Whether eating Tex-Mex in Texas, preparing Spanish food in New Mexico, or ordering burritos in California, Mexican Americans create unique food identities for themselves throughout the United States. ¡Buen provecho!

Appendix A

[A] long history of changing labels, shifting categories and revised question wording – all of which reflect evolving cultural norms about what it means to be Hispanic.

Here's a quick primer on how the Census Bureau approach works.

Q. I immigrated to Phoenix from Mexico. Am I Hispanic?
A. You are if you say so.

Q. My parents moved to New York from Puerto Rico. Am I Hispanic?
A. You are if you say so.

Q. My grandparents were born in Spain but I grew up in California. Am I Hispanic?
A. You are if you say so.

Q. I was born in Maryland and married an immigrant from El Salvador. Am I Hispanic?
A. You are if you say so.

Q. My mom is from Chile and my dad is from Iowa. I was born in Des Moines. Am I Hispanic?
A. You are if you say so.

Q. I was born in Argentina but grew up in Texas. I don't consider myself Hispanic. Does the Census count me as an Hispanic?
A. Not if you say you aren't.

(Passel, J. and Taylor, P. 2009)

Appendix B

ESSENTIAL TEX-MEX VOCABULARY

If you have trouble…understanding the difference between an enchilada and a flauta, you've come to the right place.

- Burrito: Top a flour tortilla with favorite ingredients, roll it up, and then tuck in the ends to make a burrito, which means "little burro" or donkey.

- Chimichanga: A deep-fried version of a burrito.

- Enchilada: Top a corn tortilla with meat, cheese, chili sauce, and/or chorizo sausage, roll it up, and you have an enchilada. The term means "filled with chili."

- Flauta: A white or yellow corn tortilla stuffed with beef, chicken, or pork, folded and then fried until crisp.

- Quesadillas: A flour or corn tortilla is folded in half around a filling (cheese, peppers, chorizo, and so forth) and then toasted or fried…

- Fajitas: Grilled steak, chicken, or fish rolled into a flour tortilla with grilled onions and/or peppers. Fajita comes from the Spanish faja, for girdle or strips, and describes the cut of the meat itself.

- Tacos: The story of the taco begins with the story of corn and the art of making tacos. The Mexicans often made soft tacos as appetizers, topping fresh tortillas with cooked and shredded meat and then drizzling with a green or red sauce. While crisp taco shells were a Mexican invention, they aren't used as commonly there as they are in the United States today.

- Guacamole: Avocados were abundant in Peru, the Yucatan, and Mexico. The Incas, the Mayas, and the Aztecs, respectively, mashed avocados (with and without onions and tomatoes). The fat (monosaturated) was extremely important to them nutritionally, as their diets contained little other fat. When the Europeans learned how to make guacamole, they fell into three camps when it came to seasoning: with salt, with sugar, or with both salt and sugar.

- Mole: In the Nahuatl language, mole means a concoction; indeed, this sauce is a mixture of many ingredients. Mole always starts with simmered chili peppers; in the seventeenth century a small amount of bitter chocolate was added.

- Refried beans aren't refried at all. First, pinto beans are boiled and then mashed and fried. Frijoles refritos means "well-fried beans"

  (Napier, K. 2005: 324).

Appendix C

LA BODA (THE WEDDING)

Ricardo Martinez was real proud of the fact that he grew up in Castle Hills, which was the "rich Mexican" district of San Antonio back in the 70s. I met him after his dad had squandered the family fortune. Ricardo was living with his mother, grandmother, and sister in a small government-subsidized apartment full of ornately carved furniture, bad Persian carpets, and old shopping bags stuffed with the debris *de lujo*of the fallen nouveaux riche.

A stout, beaming, brown-skinned woman named Chata silently catered to our every need. I remember thinking how cool it was that Chata had stayed with them even though they probably couldn't afford to pay her much, if at all.

For lunch, Chata served us tuna-fish sandwiches, Ruffles, homemade refried beans with crumbly Oaxacan cheese, and iced tea. Dessert was a grand Sara Lee cheesecake topped with sliced mango marinated in rum and cinnamon.

Several months into my courtship with Ricardo, he tearfully admitted that the apartment was Chata's.

(Mondini-Ruiz, F. 2005: 31)

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Vita

A native San Antonian, Marisa makes her home in northern California, where she can usually be found at Stanford football games, her undergraduate home and love. However, after thirteen generations, she will always be Tejana, and visits Texas often. A creative writer at heart, she has been writing about Mexican American identity since high school through short stories and poems, fiction and non-fiction. She is so proud that the University of Texas at Austin has allowed her to fulfill her dream of pursuing these issues in identity by achieving a Master's degree in Mexican American Studies.

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